7th HEAVEN

by

JOHN GOLDEN

Photography #250

XX

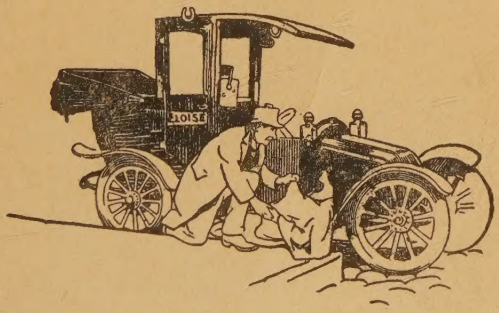
A William Fox Production. *Seventh Heaven.*

DIANE'S BRIDAL GOWN.

7TH HEAVEN

BY
JOHN GOLDEN

Based on the Play
By AUSTIN STRONG



ILLUSTRATED WITH SCENES
FROM THE PHOTOPLAY
A WILLIAM FOX PRODUCTION

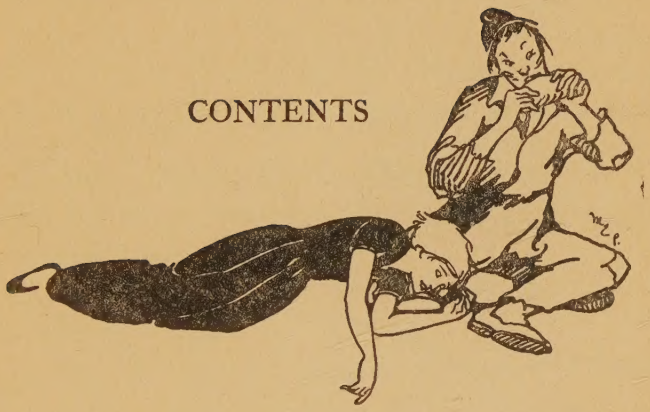
GROSSET & DUNLAP
PUBLISHERS NEW YORK

Made in the United States of America

Copyright, 1924, by
The H. K. Fly Company

MADE IN U. S. A.

CONTENTS



CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	The Little Green Door in the Wall	7
II.	A Remarkable Fellow	27
III.	Eloise Shows Temperament	51
IV.	The Sisters	65
V.	The Hole in the Sock Receives Visitors	72
VI.	Pere Chevillon	85
VII.	Diane	91
VIII.	The Vulmirs Arrive	101
IX.	Beauty in Distress Finds a Champion	114
X.	Chico Astounds Himself	129
XI.	The Grand Tour	146
XII.	Heaven	157
XIII.	Heaven Still	169

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
XIV.	The Wedding Gown	179
XV.	Brissac Brings News	197
XVI.	Ten Thousand Francs	207
XVII.	"I Am Brave"	217
XVIII.	The Fourth Year	229
XIX.	November	243
XX.	Diane's Faith Falters at Last	252
XXI.	The Clock Strikes Eleven	267

SEVENTH HEAVEN

CHAPTER I

THE LITTLE GREEN DOOR IN THE WALL

"Come, Nana! Come, Diane! Only half an hour before we start for church, and all your evening tasks to be done!"

"Yes, Uncle!" An obedient reply fluted from one young voice.

"Humph! Not till I have to!" An under-breath observation from the other, audible only as a discontented grunt.

Monsieur Georges Vulmir turned and looked keenly at his nieces where they were frolicking with the old dog Ami under the little pear tree in the garden corner. It was a precociously warm evening and the girls wore the light muslin frocks of midsummer, while the pear tree snowed upon their heads its spring flurry of white petals.

Such different heads! Somehow the contrast seemed to strike Georges Vulmir as never before in the years that he had fathered these two orphaned nieces of his, had known them as daughters in his own home. The one head, held high in sulky, stub-

born pride, was black and gleaming as a bird's wing. The other, tossed in girlish laughter, was a glory of waving red gold.

But the difference was deeper than this. Even the most casual observer must have felt it. Monsieur Vulmir turned to his wife.

"Strangely different, these two, Valentine," he observed. "As if they were of different parents. Nana, the elder—very difficult, very difficult! She must be held with the tightest of reins, like a bad-tempered horse!"

His wife looked up from the sock she was knitting to sigh a gentle assent.

"But the other—little Diane—" His stern glance passed from the black head to the red gold, and thawed like an icicle fallen upon flame.

"Ah! Our little Diane!" his wife murmured with a smile. "Like our own dear child, Georges! We could not love her more if she had been our own."

"True, true," he assented grudgingly. "But we must not permit our affections to weaken our discipline, Valentine." Evidently any unbending of his grim austerity was painful to Monsieur Vulmir.

"Come at once, girls!" he called again as the two lingered in their romp. And now, with a toss that

flung the petal shower from her mop of hair, Diane came gayly, while Nana followed with a scowl and halting steps.

Supper was just over—supper in the tiny arbor out behind the old white farm house, where this little family of four had gathered for a warm evening's meal. It had been a very simple supper, but enough. Soup, of course—Diane, little housewife that she was, was pastmistress when it came to onion soup. And milk, cold and foamy, in the fat pitcher that looked to her like the priest of the nearby church—the pitcher had a band like a cassock's rope around its belly, and its nose turned up with the jolliest tilt. And bread—plenty of golden-crusty bread, lengths and lengths of it. And then there had been a treat for dessert—Uncle Georges had been in town that day, and had brought home a bag of the little *marrons glacés* bits that the street venders sell—not the round, perfect *marrons* which are so expensive in the shops, but the broken ones, cast out by the makers, and more delicious, more sugary than the flawless *marrons*—and so cheap that even a poor farmer uncle can bring home a bag. Yes, it had been a treat indeed.

"Weren't the *marrons* delicious, Nana?" Diane cried as she fell to clearing the table in the arbor. "*That* was a supper!"

Black-eyed Nana looked down upon her contemptuously from her superior years.

"What a child you are, Diane!" she sneered. "To be delighted by such a trifle! You don't know what the world and its delights are! But," she added in a low voice, "you shall learn!" She drew near the other, cast a cautious glance to make sure that her uncle and aunt were not listening, then, to make assurance doubly sure, she whispered:

"My plans are nearly perfected! We shall go very soon, now. Be ready to set out at a moment's notice!"

The younger girl started back with a shudder as if the low, sinister whisper terrified her. "What do you say, Nana?" she exclaimed aloud. "No! No!"

At her exclamation Madame Vulmir, who had peacefully continued her knitting in a low chair beyond the arbor, glanced up; and Monsieur, who had joined her to sit on a nearby garden bench and smoke his after-supper cigar, turned an alert and formidable gaze upon the girls.

"Shut up, you little fool!" hissed Nana in the lowest of breaths, darting the knife of the eyes at her sister. "Oh, so you don't want to wash the dishes?" she demanded aloud. "You say, 'No, no!' do you?" she scolded for the benefit of the two listeners.

"But I do want to wash the dishes! That is, I don't mind!" protested Diane, not seeing through her sister's subterfuge and replying in literal fashion and with a nice regard for truth that was characteristic of her open nature.

The aunt and uncle returned to their knitting and newspaper, content to let girlish squabbles settle themselves; and the young members of the family went on with their tasks after their own fashion. This consisted of Diane's carrying the dishes from the arbor to the kitchen while Nana sulked along behind, picking up the milk pitcher, perhaps, or the loaf, by way of appearing to work. Diane's cheery humming song and her light steps carried the work along like a bright breeze, while glowering Nana scarcely lent a hand.

Once the two were alone in the kitchen, Nana took up her discussion again, while Diane made ready the pan of hot soapy water and got down the sweet clean linen towels. She rolled up her sleeves upon her thin young arms and plunged them into the suds. Nana made no move to help. With hands on hips, elbows out and head up in a defiant posture, she stood watching her young sister's quick movements.

"So! You're satisfied with life in this disgusting

farmhouse, are you—in a poor man's home, where we toil like servants?" It could hardly be said that Nana suited the action to the word, when that word was the plural pronoun.

Oh, there was a good woman called Mère Corinne,

sang Diane. "Oh, I'm happy enough," she replied to Nana's question. "I like the good old house—it's home. And I love the dear uncle and aunt who took us in when we were helpless orphans and have made this a home to us ever since. Think, Nana!" she cried. "What would have become of us but for them? Our poor broken-hearted mother—what could she do? Our father—pleasure-loving, gay-spirited—not bad, of course, in the beginning, but influenced by bad companions until he became not only an adventurer, but a gambler as well."

"Humph!" retorted Nana. "At least he got some fun out of life! He knew how to enjoy it while it lasted. Look at this hide-bound old Calvinist that we live with—"

"Nana! Nana! Don't speak so of our uncle! Of course he *is* stern, and he *does* make us go to church more than we like, but—"

"More than we like! Good heavens! Four times a day! Do you think that's the way to make *me*

religious? It drives me nearly to the devil, let me tell you that! Four times a day! Yes, that settles it. I'm not going to stand it any longer!"

"Nana, you're ungrateful. Of course the life here is frugal, for our aunt and uncle are not well off, but at least we are comfortable—we have all our wants supplied. And Aunt Valentine is the dearest, sweetest aunt—just like a mother. And Uncle Georges—of course he is dreadfully religious, and he is sometimes cross and severe, but under all that—oh, what a heart he has!"

She was hardly more than a child, this slip of a golden-haired Diane, with her spindling little white arms deep in the suds as she talked. It was pathetic to hear her—to think of what dark shadows had overhung her path already, and how fully she had realized them. And yet in spite of them the child within her would have its way.

> Oh, there was a good woman called Mère Corinne,
> She knocked at the door and I let her in,

she continued to sing, while her work never paused for an instant. And Nana continued to look on and to sneer.

"I'm going to put an end to this for both of us," she said, "and when I do—when I take you out

into the world—you'll thank your stars—and me."

"Girls! Girls! Are you ready? Your uncle is starting," came in Aunt Valentine's pleasant voice. The little lady entered the kitchen. "It ought not to take you so long, my dears, to do the dishes—two lively young girls working together."

Diane, hanging up the towels, began, "But I can't work so fast alo—"

Again Nana turned upon her the knife of the eyes. "Diane was always slow," she said to her aunt. Diane stood dumb; and the look with which she regarded her sister was nothing less than a look of terror.

* * *

The evening service in the Protestant church of the village was over and the devout had gone home. Monsieur and Madame Vulmir, walking solemnly ahead of their nieces, plodded over the ground which they covered often eight times in a day for the assurance of their souls' salvation. Calvin himself must have approved had he seen this pious couple. Somehow Calvin and Aunt Valentine wouldn't have struck you as particularly in sympathy. Her mouth was too tender, her eyes were too merry. She breathed gentleness with every word she uttered, and there was something warmly cheery about her.

The very folds in which her silky hair lay upon her forehead (hair already threaded with fine silver that showed through the pale brown) seemed to express a gentle spirit. "I believe you would find some excuse for the devil himself, Valentine!" her husband had once declared in his wrath.

But Uncle Georges! Here was a Calvinist to the marrow. A tall man of middle age, seeming even taller through his rigid erectness; a man of straight, tight-drawn lips, overhanging brows, austere nose, unrelenting jaw. He was the lord and master of tradition, to whom his wife had said, "unargued I obey" for all their married years. The soul of honor, demanding of himself the most scrupulous conduct—and demanding it of others, as well.

These were the two to whom the orphaned girls had looked for all the parental care they had ever had. Their gambler father, their broken mother, had both died so long ago that they were only dim memories to the younger girl, with here and there vivid spots. With one accord the childless Vulmirs had opened their homes to the two. They were poor, being of that class which suffers the most from poverty, in that they possessed refinement and education. But there was enough for the two homeless youngsters.

Nana, the elder, had shown from the beginning some of her father's most dangerous traits. There was a brooding spirit of resentment in her, and a lawless impulse. Her high will ruled gentle little Diane with a rod of iron, backed by the advantage of years. Diane wanted to love her, but found herself repulsed; strove to please her; obeyed; and always feared.

It was the mother who had given Diane her own nature. It was as open, as sun-loving, as joyous as that of a flower—and, like a flower, frail, to be crushed by the first blow. Diane bloomed in the warmth of home love; take away that warmth, expose her to the storms of the world, and one trembled at the thought of what might happen.

The two walked slowly behind their uncle and aunt. Nana took advantage of the position to impart some information in a low tone.

"Diane, I'm going to the tavern tonight. I've made a new friend there, and he promises to help us. If they ask where I am, be sure to say that I've gone to feed Ami."

Diane cast an appealing glance at her sister. "Don't—don't ask me to lie again, Nana!" she begged. "I hate lies. They're like soiled linen."

"Pf! Little fool! Well, then, if you're going to

play an unfair game—! But remember: no silly backing-down when the time comes to fly!"

"I—I don't think I can go with you," Diane hesitated.

"Don't you want to see the great world, with all its lights and people and prettty clothes and music halls and gay restaurants?"

"Yes—of course I do!" Diane's eyes grew big like those of a child at a fairy tale. "But—but I'm afraid, Nana!"

Again Nana said "Pf!" and again called her a little fool. But she was a useful little fool. She cooked and mended. Nana didn't intend to do without her.

The old dog Ami, chained to his hatch down by the pear tree, knew when Nana was coming. He was her confederate, her faithful ally. He knew her goings and comings—at strange hours, the comings—and he never breathed a bark. He saw her now as she slipped into the screen the lilac bushes made; it was the evening following that of the church service.

"Yes," reflected Ami, or words to that effect, whatever those canine words may be, "here she comes to feed me, as her uncle and aunt suppose. She will give me a rich soup bone, that's true; but

what she really aims at is that little green door in the wall. She's a good friend to *me* all right; *I'll* never squeal."

Nana had abandoned her visit to the tavern on the previous evening, afraid that her sister might give her away through fear of lying. Tonight she had taken the precaution not to warn the inconveniently honest Diane. She had told all the family that she was going to give Ami his supper, and he was the only one who would know of her slipping through the little green door. The dusk was coming—out she would slip—across the lane—over the meadow—through the little wood—at last the tavern, crouched like a beast there beside the long sea wall. The tavern! Nana's world! The place where she caught a glimpse of the greater world beyond. Here there was laughter, wine. Here men gathered to drink and smoke and spin yarns of their travels over a little globe—and if a fresh young face above a bodice and petticoat were present to add to their pleasure, so much the better. Men chucked you under the chin and stole a kiss. Men liked your hair if it gleamed like a black bird's wing, and they liked the flash of your black eyes. Eyes that sulked like thunder clouds at home could turn a devil of a smile on a man in the tavern. . . .

It was again unseasonably warm, and the evening meal had been served in the arbor as before. Instead of the modest family supper there had been dinner tonight, for a guest was present—Monsieur Felix Blonde, the village lawyer, a very particular friend of Monsieur Vulmir. Madame Vulmir had debated as to whether to kill a chicken or a rabbit for the occasion, and had decided in favor of the rabbit with plenty of wine in the stew, because Monsieur Blonde had once told her that no woman of his acquaintance knew as she did the art of concocting this delicious dish. There were the freshest of vegetables pulled in the garden, and Diane's onion soup, and now in the twilight, down in the garden, the two men were topping off with cup after cup of *café noir*, *petits verres* of cognac, and interminable strong cigars, while they talked of voyages, cargoes, and investments. Stupid talk, Nana thought as she slipped away. That it might hold a meaning for her own future never occurred to her.

"It's an interesting thing, how the pearl business is growing, Felix," Monsieur Vulmir observed. "Strange, how a demand on one side of the earth suddenly creates a supply on the other. The ladies of Europe are wearing pearls more and more, and this has prompted dealers to seek pearls in the South

Seas. A whim of fashion, and the fortunes of men take a whirl."

Monsieur Blonde listened with interest. "My wife has been saying that she wanted a pearl ring—even my modest wife! I didn't realize, though, that it was a straw showing which way the wind of trade blows."

The other nodded. "It is indeed. Women of all classes are now desiring this stone. The pearl used to be worn by none but ladies of high rank. But there's a fortune today for anyone who has capital to put into this newly awakened industry. Even a very little money may be doubled, trebled, in a short time."

Click, click, went Madame Vulmir's needles. On, on went the talk. Diane, alone in the kitchen, tinkled the dishes as she washed them and her bright young voice rang out.

> Oh, there was a good woman named Mère Corinne,
> She loved the truth and hated sin.

Down by the lilacs bushes old Ami gnawed contentedly on a succulent bone. The twilight deepened. The *café noir* left in the tall lean pot grew cold. Madame was knitting by touch now—it was too dark to see her needles. Diane lighted a candle

in the kitchen, and its flame tossed off rays that tangled like brilliant butterflies in her red gold hair. The smoke from the mens' cigars crept up through the dusk like tiny wraiths. Its odor mingled with the scent that the lilac bloom gave forth. The dusk became thick.

Nana, from the knoll beyond the garden wall, looked back. She could hear the mens' talk droning on in their deep, gritty voices there in the dark garden. Everything was obscure except for that one bright spot—the kitchen window, in it Diane's young face and her bright hair lighted by the candle's flame. Even Nana felt the beauty of the picture.

"Hmph!" she reassured herself, however. "Any man will tell you that he likes the black-haired ones better!"

She paused for a moment to make sure of her calculations. Yes: her uncle and his friend were sure to talk till nearly midnight, and Uncle Georges would then go to bed not dreaming but that the two girls were in their own room. Aunt Valentine might gently ask Diane where Nana was, and Diane would reply that she had gone to feed Ami, and had then probably slipped up to bed. Nana had said that she was tired and must retire early. And when Diane went to the bed and found it empty she would

say nothing. As for Ami—at whatever hour she might return, he would keep still. Mum was the word for the wise Ami!

Nana dipped into the meadow, threaded her dark way through the wood, and at the end was met by the tavern's light as it streamed forth.

"Aha, there, my black beauty!" came a greeting as she entered the room, dense with tobacco smoke, and there was a chorus of rough laughter as the man who had addressed her stepped forward with a mock-gallant bow, his hand upon his heart.

Although coarse and sensual in appearance, he wore a touch more of sophistication than the others present. His sun-and-wind-burned face, his far-seeing eye, and his carriage proclaimed him a sea-faring man. There was a certain mastery in his manner, the gay domineering that appeals to many women.

Nana met him with hands on hips, a toss of the head, a flash of the eyes. "Who said it was *your* black beauty?" she retorted, and at this another chorus of laughter rumbled forth from the alcoholic throats convivially assembled.

"So—you reject my humble suit!" exclaimed the man, and tipsily attempted to maintain his rôle by sinking to one knee.

"Better not try kneeling—it's not in your line!"

flashed Nana, and a larger burst of laughter greeted her cheap wit. Oh, a merry time the tavern had whenever she arrived, ostensibly to call upon her boon companion, Marie, the tavern keeper's wife.

As the men turned back to their glasses and their talk, the one who had addressed her stepped to her side. "I've something to say to you alone," he muttered. Then, with a jerk of the head that indicated the direction of the wood—"in ten minutes," he added.

Her lips formed a "Yes," and she turned away to chat with Marie. Ten minutes later she made an excuse to leave the room, and was soon joined in the wood by the man. He took her arm with a rough clasp and led her deeper; the thick black of the wood closed about their whispered conversation.

It was deep in the night when Diane woke from a troubled dream. She was dreaming of a dark, twisted staircase up which she seemed compelled to climb, while Nana peered from a dingy room at the top and cried with a leer, "Welcome home!" Waking, she gave a little moan of distress at the dream; "Hush!" came in a sharp sibilant from the real Nana, and, as she groped her way to consciousness, Diane found that her sister was indeed standing before her, dressed even to a street coat of

old-fashioned cut, the garment reserved for state occasions. A candle burned on the low chest of drawers where the girls kept what simple clothes they had; the drawers stood open, with garments dangling from them.

Nana bent close over his sister. "Hurry up, little fool," she whispered. "Get up and dress as fast as you can, and if you make a sound I'll pay you for it!" Her face was threatening and compelling; Diane shrank back.

"Nana, Nana, what are you doing? What do you mean? Where are we going?" she whispered.

"Drop those questions. Didn't I tell you to keep still? I've got every arrangement made. A gentleman—this new friend of mine I met at the tavern a week ago—is going to take us to Paris. I didn't expect it as soon as this, but he's been called there suddenly and it's now or never for us. Come, help me pack our clothes." Nana held up the bundle into which she was hustling the garments which she pulled at random from the drawers.

"I've got bread and cheese, too," she displayed another bundle. "I sneaked them from the kitchen. The coast is clear. Uncle's snoring like an engine, and Aunt's as still as a kitten. Come, child, hurry!"

All the time that Nana kept up this talk in the

lowest of whispers she was pulling the frightened Diane from bed, helping her put on her clothes, packing the bundle, punctuating her talk with warning glances and shakes of the head. And Diane—

Diane was like a creature hypnotized. She was still intoxicated with sleep; being snatched from it by this threatening vision of her sister was like passing from one bad dream into another. She was white with fear and her teeth chattered in a nervous chill; but, dumbly, she obeyed. She dressed, she helped Nana complete the packing; she offered no resistance. Once, as they were finishing, she murmured:

"Nana, oh, Nana, let me go and put a goodbye kiss on dear Aunt Valentine's forehead!"

"Idiot! And wake the household!"

Diane shrank hopelessly. But she searched her sister's eyes.

"Nana, I shall miss them both. They have been good to me. Do you think—oh, Nana, do you think we shall be happy in the great city?"

"Happy? You'll have everything you could wish, you young blockhead. Silk dresses, and white slippers with buckles, and such parties, with pastry and wines! And lovers! Come, child!"

She reached out a commanding hand and Diane took it. Full of misgivings, loath to throw off the

old, yet starry-eyed at thought of the new—into the darkness Diane followed. A faint whistle sounded from outside the window. Nana leaned out.

"All right. We're ready," she called softly to one who waited in the blackness below.

She pushed Diane ahead of her.

"Step on the trellis,—careful, now!—then he'll help you climb down," she breathed. Diane, trembling, stepped forth—vanished. Nana came immediately after. There were low whisperings, then the darkness swallowed them both.

Next morning a heavy wind and rain descended, and in the bleakness of the storm the little green door in the wall swung, clanging dismally, back and forth. It waked Monsieur Vulmir from his contented snoring.

"Nana must have forgotten to lock the door, when she fed the dog last evening," he fumed. "Nana!" he called. "Nana!"

But no Nana answered. The green door clanged again, somberly, like a knell. Ami, the only one who could have told, held silence.

CHAPTER II

A REMARKABLE FELLOW

Somewhere in Paris, that brightest and blackest of cities, where dark and evil-looking nooks and corners abound in the midst of a world of art and splendor, is a corner more dark and evil-looking than the rest. This spot goes by the name of The Hole in the Sock. It is a mere *cul de sac*, a backwater where disreputable inhabitants of a disreputable neighborhool meet, and lurk, and exchange sinister secrets, and drink, and compare notes on thieving—and worse.

Few people from the outside venture into this little blind alley which leads nowhere beyond itself, out of which there is no issue except around the base of the church which forms one end of it, and at whose feet huddle a pile of grimy buildings, like soiled and sickly children crouching at the knees of an angelic guardian—a guardian that seems to have grown absent-minded, or to have wearied of and given up the attempt to save its hopeless charges. It stands there, massive and impassive, the Church

of the Heavenly Angels, its grey buttresses climbing skyward through layer upon layer of foul air, its dust-blurred windows seemingly blind to the squalor outside, and heavily barred, as though to keep all the goodness within.

If this is a representative and messenger of Heaven, then surely the two neighboring buildings might be named emissaries of Hell. On one side leans tipsily over the sidewalk a wineshop whose name, though not so proclaimed on any visible signboard, is the "Café de la Bouche," "The Mouth," for short; a ragged awning veiling its door like a neglected beard. This is a rear entrance of the Café which faces on the Boulevard to the left. On the other side of the alley a drab stone house stands, sinister and stonily impassive, all its windows significantly closed, as one who shuts his eyes lest anyone detect in them the record of evil thoughts and deeds.

But these are not all. Upon The Hole in the Sock opens still another door; and this door, in the days before the war, was of the greatest significance. For there issued from it, day after day, a remarkable fellow. That is, he was a remarkable fellow in his own estimation.

His front door was the sewer trap. He was Chico.

Chico and nothing more, by virtue of the fact ("virtue" being his own little joke), that he had never had a father. His *alma mater*, the streets of Paris—the worst streets. His religion, a remarkable doctrine that he had worked out by himself, screwing his brain into hard knots over it. His ties and bonds—those of the wind that blows. Chico supposed that he must have had a mother at some period in his career, but of this he had no convincing proof and it took convincing proof of anything to satisfy this profound philosopher; as for other relatives, he had never dreamed of such. His society—the scavengers, or "sewer rats" among whom he earned his daily bread, especially one Pierre, known as the Rat because of his uncanny likeness to the rodent. His occupation—cleaning the sewers of Paris.

This was Chico—that is, the outward and visible youth. But the inward and invisible was an amazing person. It rose upon the wings of ambition, and soared. People who passed through the Hole often saw a strong young hand lift the grating of the sewer trap, saw a broad-shouldered, high-chested, mightily good-looking young man rise from the depths, emerge through the trap and reach the street level, where he gave himself a hearty shake

like a vigorous and good-tempered puppy that shakes himself free of a mud puddle. But no one could know that this was the mere beginning of his ascent. In the world of his dreams he rose to the very heights. For this ambitious youth, nothing daunted, looked ahead to the lofty goal of the Hose.

Now the Hose is that department of Paris' efficiency which cleans the streets themselves, leaving them the immaculate highways of which the true Parisian ever boasts. A man who wields a hose above ground is to a man who cleans the sewer below ground what the first violin is to the drumstick. When Chico sighed to belong to the Hose, he sighed for heights apparently unattainable. And yet, beneath his despondent longing, glowed a warm hope. For after all, is there anything that a remarkable fellow can't achieve, once he sets himself to the task?

Himself—that was the word. He had himself alone to rely on. The claptrap, poppycock of the ignorant about a "*bon Dieu*"—he had heard enough of that rubbish! A *bon Dieu* indeed; sneered Chico. Tommyrot! He knew the truth.

"Chico, what do you believe in, anyway?" Arlette once asked him. Arlette was the plump daughter of the wineshop-keeper, a pert young miss but kindly withal.

"Believe in?" repeated Chico loftily. "I believe in—this!" and he significantly tapped his breast to indicate his own brave spirit.

"But you must believe in the *bon Dieu!*"

"Do I believe in children's fairy books!" jeered Chico. "I am above such ridiculous ideas. *I—I* am an atheist!"

He declared this fact with expanded chest. He was tremendously proud of it. Somewhere he had picked up the term, and it sounded to him very impressive. An atheist he declared himself day in and day out, at every opportunity. Doubtless it impressed not only himself, but those sinful and yet devout members of society with whom he consorted in the Hole. They might pick a pocket, beat a wife, snitch from an open window or even cut a throat, but they felt it advisable to go to mass occasionally, and to slip a bead or two by way of soul's salvation. To be an athetist—*ma foi!* But that was a daring and terrible thing to be!

Long years before, when Chico was a little blue-eyed youngster with yellow curls (now turned to the darkest brown) and a snub nose and a dirty face and a ragged blouse, a significant thing had happened. He was then alone in the world quite as much as he was today; he picked up a living by offering odds

and ends for sale on the street, such as a bag of messy bonbons, or a bunch of wilted flowers, a glove, a pencil, a handkerchief. Needless to say, his customers did not greatly desire the article for which they gave him a coin; but the merry mouth that displayed two rows of dazzling teeth combined with the blue eyes in a smile so irresistable that whatever he offered found its purchaser.

One day he was walking with a small companion, Jean, and both were very hungry. Business had been poor in their line of trade.

"If I go home without a *sou*, I'll get a beating," said Jean.

"I'm lucky! I haven't any home to go to, so I never get beaten!" Chico responded. They fell silent, perhaps reflecting in their poor little neglected noodles as to which situation was preferable.

As they turned a corner they came upon a young girl sitting upon the step of a church. Her head lay back against the cold stone pillar. At first they thought her asleep; but as they came close and peered at her curiously, they decided that she was ill or fainting.

"Look what she's got!" whispered Jean. His beady little eyes fixed themselves upon a half loaf of bread that peeped from under her shawl. "Say,

you don't s'pose she'll wake up when I take it, do you? I could knock her down, but she might yell for the police."

Chico rose to an amazing height. His small childish form seemed almost to reach to man's estate as his indignation drew him erect. Down the bridge of his small nose he looked scornfully at Jean.

"Would you steal that girl's loaf?" he demanded.

"Oh, now, don't go to preaching at me! Where did you get the bonbons you sold yesterday? Didn't I see you snitch them from that fat vender at the corner?"

"That's different," declared Chico. "He's a man, and big and strong. He could beat me—if he could catch me. But this is a girl, and she isn't as strong as we are, and she's sick. Shame on you, Jean!"

But as Chico uttered the words, Jean's swift, sly hand went out, snatched the broken loaf. His equally swift little legs were making off down the street. But Chico was swifter; with a blow that sent the young thief reeling, the Avenger stood over him.

"You'll take that bread back to the girl, or I'll beat your young face to a pudding!" cried the terrible Chico.

And, under threats that sent him shuddering

along, the wretched little Jean restored the loaf to its rightful owner. He never lost his terror of Chico from that day on—nor his wholesome admiration of him.

That was Chico. Steal he did, in his untaught childhood—though he outgrew the habit early, by virtue of his own strangely self-taught code of honor. But even in his youngest days that instinctive honor showed itself in a thousand ways such as his lecture to Jean. He went hungry that night, and made Jean do the same, because he wouldn't allow a sick and feeble young girl to be robbed.

"You like girls!" Jean jeered at him, to get even.

"Pf! I detest them!" boasted Chico manfully. "But I wouldn't do a dirty sneaking thing like that. Girls! They're silly. I've no use for them!"

He puffed out his juvenile chest and swaggered on. He didn't enjoy being caught at his good deeds, and as for being laughed at for defending a girl—that was humiliating indeed. But in spite of the bold bad front which he preferred to turn toward the world, Chico couldn't help his good impulses. They would prevail, in spite of him.

What obscure heritage of honor and fine feeling may have been hidden in the mind and heart of this street gamin, his Maker only knows. Whether it

came to him as the gift of a lost mother, or an unnamed father can only be guessed. Or did his child mind, by some prompting of its own, turn instinctively to that which was higher than he had ever known? Were there unconscious memories, perhaps of influences loftier than he ever dreamed of? The reason lies hidden in the great sealed book of Causes, but the fact remains that this youth grew up as a straight, tall, sky-pointing tree sometimes grows in a grove of other trees all bent and distorted. His very character seemed to stand up straight and tall, to square its shoulders, and look you in the eye.

Chico not only looked man in the eye—he thus confronted God as well. His philosophy being of his own making, it was audacious, square-fronted, challenging. He heard a great deal of God from time to time—pickpockets that he knew had a way of crossing themselves, and women of the streets sometimes took out their rosaries. They all believed in God, so they told him. Once a dismal, gaunt priest with a body like a coffin and a face like a gargoyle, had tried to convert him and had told him a great deal about *le bon Dieu.*

Then he fell to thinking it over.—What, forsooth, had the good God ever done for him? He

had been tumbled into the world, as entirely a victim of accident as the potato which he saw tumbled upon the pavement from a passing vegetable cart. He had brought himself up, God knows how. (Chico caught himself saying "God knows," and shrugged—a mere habit, caught from the fools of this world—of course God did *not* know anything about it!) He had gone to bed hungry in his childhood more often than he had gone to bed filled, and he had slept sometimes in a garret, sometimes in a hidden corner on the street, where the steps of a building formed a nook, sometimes in a peddler's cart—anywhere that he could drop and snatch a wink. He had grown up unloved, uncared for, dirty and ragged. Did all this look like a "*bon*" *Dieu?* Chico fairly laughed aloud at the absurdity of the idea.

In the beginning he had accepted the common belief, and had occasionally gone to mass and said a prayer. Later, he had followed the teachings of the coffin-like priest. Oh, yes, he had been very religious—very religious, indeed. But later on, he had come to think for himself. Thinking for one's self is not possible to everyone, of course. Only to a Remarkable Fellow.

His final conclusions however, were not reached

until he had given *le Bon Dieu* a fair chance. He put Him to the test. This was a square enough thing to do, Chico argued—surely nothing could be squarer. The test was his own idea, and was carried out with the most scrupulous fairness.

First, having decided that his greatest desire in life was the Hose, he determined to pray fervently for an appointment to that noble service. He chose the finest church in Paris to make his prayer. Surely if this God was listening anywhere, it must be in the Cathedral of Notre Dame. Thither he went, and bought the largest candle in the place for five francs.

This was a large expenditure for Chico, but he made it gladly. His test was to be thorough. Having offered up the most beseeching prayer of which he was capable, he waited.

Nothing happened.

Instead of some sort of magic carpet alighting before him, picking him up and flying off with him to his upper world of desire, he remained exactly where he had been—in the sewer. Chico rubbed his eyes and looked about him. There were the same old manhole, the same old pipes, the same old Rat.

But, determined to try the thing out fairly, he

decided to buy another candle. Perhaps the *Dieu* had some reason of His own for keeping him a scavenger. Now he would give him a further trial.

"A wife—a wife with yellow hair—that is my desire," prayed Chico.

Deep in his queer, lonely heart he longed for a companion, a helpmate. And yellow hair, yellow like gold, had always been his admiration. Surely, even if he must remain a sewer man, he might at least have the comfort of a loving wife at home!

The candle burned to its end, the flame died, and Chico found himself still the same lonely scavenger as before. No sign of a wife on the horizon. He prayed until the beads of perspiration rolled from him, but still no woman crossed his path except the women of the street for whom he had always held a pitying scorn.

Yet he determined to give *le bon Dieu* one more chance, and then, if He couldn't see that there was such a person as Chico, neither could Chico see that there was such a One as the Dieu! His third desire was for some great, some thrilling experience, such as the wealthy know. Of all things he desired to call a taxi, to enter it proudly, giving the driver orders to make the Grand Tour—to the Place de la Concorde, along the Champs Elysées, by the Arc de

Triomphe to the Bois de Boulogne: to wind up at his own humble door, that of number 48 Rue Notre Dame de Lorette, where he would enter with a flourish after paying the bill carelessly, with an air of perdition-take-the-expense!

All of this glowing plan he described carefully in his prayer. He paid another five francs, lighted another candle, and prayed himself weary.

And the end found him exactly where he had been all along—wifeless—without any possibility of a thrilling adventure—and stuck in the sewer, apparently for the rest of his days. And he was fifteen francs to the bad, besides.

Then it was that he cast off God for good and all, and relied upon himself. He had climbed from the level of a thieving, begging, vagabond childhood to that of a wage-earning, self-supporting citizen. His was the humblest of all callings, to be sure, but it was honest and self-respecting. And now he saw himself in his visions climbing on, up, up the ladder.

"There's no need of being down in the world," he said loftily to his understudy. "Set your mind upon climbing, Rat, and climb you will."

His friend, the Rat looked up at him in admiring envy. How tall and magnificent Chico was, to be

sure, with his handsome young head held high, his broad shoulders braving the world, his clean-limbed movements so free and powerful. His face was frank, open, sunny, lighted by bright blue eyes; his teeth flashed often in a good-tempered smile. A shock of dark brown hair showed always an incorrigible will to curl in spite of the severity with which Chico plastered it down. Somehow this hair seemed symbolic of all his warmer impulses, which Chico was forever trying to plaster down into rigidity and which wouldn't be plastered.

"Well—what are you staring at me so for, Rat?" the master went on. "Don't you believe what I say?"

"Yes—I believe it—for you," the Rat replied. "Because you're a remarkable fellow. But for such as I am——!"

His gesture was so drolly despairing that Chico laughed. He, in turn, studied his companion with close attention.

The Rat was as curious a being as ever chanced to be classified under the head of "Human." He seemed a personification of his calling. Even as Chico shook the slime of the sewer from him, did the Rat seem to enter into it, to become a part of it, body and soul. He was small, furtive, quickly

darting, beady-eyed, quick to scent danger and to scurry away to darkness. And yet, base as he was, a strange friendship existed between this creature and the younger man to whom he looked up with nothing less than reverence. If the Rat possessed one high quality, it was loyalty to his friend.

Strange, indeed, the social group which foregathered in the Hole in the Sock, where Chico stood ever as social leader. Many were the hobnobbings that took place in that dark corner of Paris' darkest district. If there was only bread and cheese to share, well and good; the group shared fairly. Now and then a bottle of red wine was added—so much the better.

Boul the old cab driver, was a leading member of these intimates. Boul was a person of vast bulk and impressive presence. Clad in the soiled pale tan coat of the Paris *cocher*, a white painted hat atop his grizzled head, his round face with its round eyes, round mouth and round button of a nose popped forth between like a rising moon.

Boul, too, admired Chico. "There's no doubt he really is a remarkable fellow," he admitted to Arlette. "But I never tell him so. He's young. It might go to his head." Boul thought best to assume a paternal manner, but he looked forward to being

one day proud to claim acquaintance with this young star-gazer.

But as these, and many other convivial and humble spirits of the Hole looked up to Chico, so did Chico look up to Maximilian Gobin. For Gobin represented that world to which Chico aspired with all his soul—the world of the Hose. Gobin was a most impressive person, with tremendous moustachios and a haughty mien, and when he walked past these frequenters of the Hole, on his way to the wineshop of Arlette's father, he barely cast a glance down his proud nose at the sewer cleaners who lounged there. Such society for a member of the Hose! Bah! In the blue linen blouse and leather apron of his calling, with a sailor's jaunty blue *beret* with red pompom nattily perched upon his lofty head, Gobin disdained such creatures of the lower depths.

"*Ma foi!* How I should like to be able to strut past humble people as he struts!" sighed Chico.

The devoted Rat sighed. "When you are on the Hose, will you strut past me?" he asked wistfully. Even this dirty, thieving little scavenger could feel affection.

Chico regarded him with contempt in which there was a touch of pity—and perhaps the glance was not altogether without affection on his side, as well.

"Bah! What a Rat you are!" he said. "And yet you are loyal. If you behave yourself I'll not snub you when I rise to high places," he added patronizingly, and slapped the miserable creature's shoulder.

"Behave myself—how?" eagerly.

Chico laughed. Oh—let us say, if you continue to share a bottle with me when you find any wine that is good," he replied, and lounged away. Chico was too remarkable a fellow to enjoy long converse with a mere Rat. He had great thoughts of his own, and must be left to their contemplation.

A clatter of hoofs sounded along the worn-out and humpy pavement, and up drove an ancient and broken-down cab drawn by a still more ancient, still more broken-down horse.

"Hi! Hup! Up there—whoa—whoa, Eloise!" shouted a bellowing voice, and behold! Boul on his chariot. Chico loafed forward once more to exchange a greeting.

"We are talking about the time when I shall become great—when I shall be on the Hose," the young man observed. "The Rat wants to know whether I shall cut out my old friends."

Boul, descending from his perch, stared with popping round eyes as if the idea were a blow.

"And will you?" he demanded.

"I told the Rat, not if he behaves himself, which means, if he shares his good bottles when he gets them," Chico replied with a laugh. "The same applies to you!"

Boul laughed heartily. "Trust you to be a good fellow, Chico—always a good fellow," he responded heartily. "Old friends won't be forgeten by such a man!" He flung his fat old arm about Chico's broad young shoulder and the Rat, on Chico's other side, did likewise.

Drink a Little Bit
Steal with Care
Lie Right out of it
Fight and Dare——

Boul bellowed in his portly old basso. And the others joined, with jovial step, in a bar from a dance, Chico singing in a hearty young tenor, and the Rat in a squeak so suited to his name that one might have looked up instinctively expecting to see the cat dart forth.

Not a cat, but the plump and pretty Arlette, from her father's wineshop door. She shook a reproving finger at the three.

"Such a noise as you're always making! Our wine-shop is a decent place, and I won't have rowdies singing and roaring outside the door!"

"What you want is that we should come inside the door, and buy, isn't it, my fine young Arlette?" Chico retorted, and the others joined in a laugh at her expense. "Inside we could make all the noise we wanted to. Well—another time, my young woman. At present, I've a long section of sewer to clean, and I must be off. Come, Rat!"

The Rat followed. "Where do we go?" he inquired.

"To another division. All the way to the Boulevard. I have special orders for this afternoon. Come," and he vanished into the trap in the gutter, the Rat close behind him.

* * *

The afternoon was a busy one for the two scavengers. With a number of others, they were detailed to a certain section of the Boulevard system, where alterations had made extra work to be done. The labor was long and heavy, and the hours lumbered painfully on. While Chico worked vigorously, as always, his mind played about his dream of a life upon the street level.

High above their heads rolled on the life of Paris, like mighty waves now thundering and crashing, now swinging in smooth, quiet rhythm in a

boundless sea. Paris the gleaming, Paris the throbbing, Paris the loving, the laughing, the forgetting. It walked and talked and drove, it drank and smoked and coquetted—all far above them, ignorant of their existence. And yet how dependent is a great city on its meanest citizens! Paris would be a very different Paris without the offices of men like these.

Along the sidewalk came a fat priest. He was a rosy, cherubic little man with a round, honest face topped by a large shovel hat. His honest blue eyes behind round spectacles were engrossed in the book over whose pages he pored as he walked. His brow, which anyone would have known to be a mild one, was puckered like that of a child over a page of difficult decimals. His black skirts swished about his feet, he occasionally bumped into a passer-by and didn't even know it, so absorbed was he in the breviary.

At a corner he stopped, jerking his nose out of his book. Something seemed to tell him that this was *his* corner. Yes—here he was to cross the Boulevard, *en route* to a missionary task down the next street. He gave a quick glance about to assure himself that this was the proper turn, then once more his nose dived into the breviary. Like

one walking in sleep, he started straight across the crowded Boulevard. It was as if a blindfolded being who could not swim had plunged into the engulfing waves.

"*La!*" "*Voila!*"

"Beware, the omnibus!"

"See—it is a Holy Father!"

"Stop—Father, be careful—don't you see?"

A confusion of shouts came hurtling into his ears. The sharp cry of a chauffeur. The yell of the omnibus driver. Screams of women, shouts of men.

The little priest looked up, bewildered. All around him surged the traffic—the crowding, hurrying traffic of a great city. He was in the thick of it. It seethed on all sides. He looked forward, backward, around in a daze. His book went flying from his hand. He made a dart to recover it. Above him loomed an omnibus. The driver was trying to stop, shouting . . . A wilderness of confusion . . . A sense of being hurled through space. . . .

Chico, with the assistance of the Rat, had completed his work beneath this part of the Boulevard. "We may as well go above through that trap," he said. "Then we can walk on the street level back to our quarter." Chico sought daylight whenever possible.

He started up, raised the trap door and peered about. Just beyond him swarmed the gay throng of the afternoon. His head popped up so close that he felt a part of the throng, and yet not a part. It all belonged to that other world for which he longed.

"It's lively today," he called down to the Rat. "Women in fine dresses, and men making love to them. There goes a fool of a priest with his nose in his book. He'd better look out, or he'll be run over. Bah! I despise priests!"

"That's because you're an atheist," responded the Rat. He didn't know very clearly what an atheist was, but he was immensely proud to claim one for an acquaintance.

Chico had lowered the trap for a moment to converse. "Follow my example and become one," he advised. He peered forth again. It's the liveliest afternoon I've——ah! Halt, there! Can't you stop——"

With a cry Chico sprang up through the sewer opening, leaving the Rat gaping below. He darted forth upon the street—into the thick of the rushing traffic—between hoofs, under wheels it seemed—hurling his powerful young body forth, defying every danger. . . . The omnibus swayed with the

driver's jerk upon the wheel, stopped with a crashing halt. . . . "A Holy Father!" cried women. One fainted. Men rushed forward. . . . On the sidewalk beyond, Chico was putting the little priest upon his feet, having dragged him to safety.

For moments the Father blinked and swayed in a daze. Then, recovering himself,

"Why, my good young man, you have saved my life!" he cried.

Chico shrugged.

"But you risked your own to do so! I wonder you are not ground to powder!"

Again Chico shrugged.

"You must tell your name. And your place of business."

"Chico. My office suite is the sewer." With still another shrug Chico laughed at his own little jest and moved off.

"I must reward you," the Holy Father was crying as he struggled to set his shovel hat straight upon his round little head.

But with a final shrug Chico had vanished into the throng. He didn't want a reward. He didn't want anything to do with priests.

"I was peeking. I saw you save his life. My,

but you were brave!" squeaked the Rat. "You nearly got crushed to death."

"Now I wonder what I did it for, anyway?" mused Chico. "I despise priests. That's the way with me. I'm always doing the thing I don't want to do."

CHAPTER III

ELOISE SHOWS TEMPERAMENT

A battered old taxicab, battle-scarred from the hard usage life had dealt her, stood in the Hole, just outside the wine-shop door. A broad tan back bent over the machinery, while the owner of the back struggled desperately to induce it to start. He had tried coaxing, he had tried severity; he couldn't see anything further to try unless he should pick up the car bodily and carry it off. But, although hopeless, he toiled on.

A strolling gendarme looked on with amusement. As he paused to observe, the taxicab suddenly gave vent to an explosive "No!" and settled back more stubbornly than ever. The face of round, staring despair that was turned to the gendarme at this moment was none other than that of the whilom master of Eloise the horse. It was Chico's rotund old friend, Boul.

"The devil, those cabs, aren't they?" observed the gendarme with a smile.

"This one is an angel. I do this for the sake of

—of a little constitutional once a day!" the old driver replied, and once more he bent, puffing, over the snorting and obdurate machinery. His broad back, bent to an acute angle, heaved up and down in his struggle.

The gendarme laughed and passed on. As he did so, Boul raised his head and followed him with a wise eye as he continued his stroll out of the *cul de sac,* into which he had wandered, as he occasionally did, to maintain an effect of vigilance over its disreputable inhabitants.

The cab-driver was still occupied with ineffectual experiments, when, by a caprice as incalculable as that of her obduracy, the taxi's obscure internal arrangements whirred with a roar of lawless abandon.

As fast as his bulk could be removed from the crank to the steering wheel, the old man hoisted himself to the driver's seat. His reaching it was the signal for the engine's abrupt silence, a stillness as of sudden death. Undiscouraged, he climbed down again and gingerly raised the hood. When, peering, he had leaned his face close enough to inspect those enigmatic works, it was met by a volley of sparks. The taxi, resenting familiarity like a perfect lady, had unmistakably spat in his face. She was resourceful, more resourceful than himself, he

admitted, as, lifting his white painted hat, he stood on the sidewalk, pensively scratching his grizzled head with one finger.

Before he had determined upon his next method of treatment, however, his attention was withdrawn from his own individual conflict of wills.

From the door of the wine-shop before which man and taxi were perforce stationed, shadowily slipped a figure whose rapidity and silence of motion called to mind that furtive scurry of a rat. In fact, it was that of the Rat himself. His beady eyes darted quick glances in all directions, to spy out the enemy, all mankind being lumped under that name. One arm hugged a canvas bundle to his side. With a swift motion, raising the grating of the sewer trap in the gutter, he was about to disappear into the dark below when Arlette, a whirlwind of blue-apron and pig-tails swept after him in time to seize him by the collar, jerking him sharply to a sitting posture on the edge of the trap.

"You thief, you! I saw you!" she screamed, shaking him.

"Don't you call me names! I gave you the money for my drink—I did, I did!" whined Arlette's victim.

"You stole a bottle from the counter while my

back was turned." With her disengaged hand she slapped his face. "I saw in the mirror!" A balancing slap on his other cheek punctuated her speech. "Give it to me, or I'll call the Sergeant of Police."

"I haven't got your bottle! Call the police, if you want to," he bade her, more virtuous than convincing, for the girl instantly raised her voice in a piercing cry:

"Police!"

Alarmed at this literal acceptance of his challenge, he leaped to his feet, protesting in an urgent undertone: "My God! S-s-ssh! I was joking! Can't you tell when I'm joking? It won't do to get the police in here! Haven't you got any common sense?"

But the girl was serious.

"Police——" A second shout was about to cut the air, leaping from her lips like a bright blade, when it seemed suddenly to be forced back into its sheath, as a large hand was clapped over her mouth.

The old cabman who had stood as an interested spectator, feeling the scene to have gone far enough, had entered upon it to arrange matters agreeably. As a preliminary, he had quenched the girl's voice with his palm.

"Hush, my dear," he cautioned in conciliating

tones; "Let a sleeping dog die—and the police, as well. The enemy is quiet."

The enemy to him also, then, was represented by the agents of law and order! Turning to the culprit, "Give what you've got to the lady—give it to her at once, miserable Rat!" he ordered with impressive dignity.

Reluctantly, yet with reluctance tinged with covert triumph, the Sewer Rat produced a large bottle of wine from among his rags.

The cabman, taking it from him, presented it gallantly to the "Lady." "There's your bottle," he grinned.

She snatched it from him, no hint of gratitude in the eye that pointedly pinned him: "You old thief, you!" was her only thanks. Then turning to the other: "As for you, Sewer Rat, if you ever come here again, my father shall open a bottle on your head!" With this she vanished under the shadow of the tattered awning, the slam of the door and a grunt from the outraged cabman accompanying her departure.

In the silence that followed, the two men looked at each other with a faintly sympathetic gleam; the Rat stealthily sidling up to his fellow-culprit and

opening the palm of his dirty hand, disclosed a glittering brooch.

Boul gazed upon it with interest, picked it up, rubbed it with an investigative forefinger.

"That's nothing but plated," he declared scornfully. "It never belonged to anybody of class. Now, the only kind of jewelry that's worth troubling about is genuine gold——"

"I tell you it *is* real gold!" squeaked the Rat in a whimpering protest. "And if it isn't, it's worth something anyway. You're always trying to snub me, whatever I do. I thought you'd like that brooch. I'll wager its worth five francs." He was still holding it firmly, but now the cocher's fat hand closed upon the spoil.

"You may count yourself lucky if I get two francs for it," he observed, and pocketed it.

"But where do I come in?" whimpered the Rat.

"You're lucky to come in at all. You're greedy, Rat!" chuckled Boul. His eyes now fell upon the canvas bag that the other carried, and he pointed to it with an inquiring lift of the eyebrows.

"That's the meal that Chico ordered me to get. We're all going to dine up here this evening—together—and I've got bread and sausage and an

onion! It's nearly six o'clock now and that's the hour!" The Rat smacked hungry lips.

"Hmph! You talk as if you thought you were going to eat with us!" scorned Boul. With the words he seized the bag of food and tossed it in on the taxi's seat.

"I am."

"Who said so?"

The Rat did not reply directly to this, but fumbled about in the labyrinth of his rags. He had it! From the depths he produced another bottle, carefully screening it from the wine-shop door.

"Maybe *you'll* invite me yourself, now!" he grinned, holding the bottle where Boul's eager eye could rest upon it.

Snatching it from him and half hiding it under his own coat, with a stifled "Look out!," the old man beamed upon the Rat. "Pretty work! Pretty work!" A look of tender interest washed over his burnt-brick face as he inspected the bottle's label, and after a subdued whistle, reverently kissed it.

"For this, my friend, you shall be the guest of honor!" and the bottle followed the food-bag into the cab's interior.

The Rat meanwhile, with a hasty promise to urge Chico to hurry, had disappeared down the sewer

trap, at sight of an individual approaching from the end of the lane leading to the front of the church on the nearby Boulevard. The man came at a deliberate and stately gait, self-respect written in every line of his upright person. After him he dragged a considerable stretch of hose, the unforgettable Paris street-cleaning hose, that affair of jointed pipes running on small, far-spaced wheels which give the effect of a centipede prodigiously magnified and stretched to the proportions of a dragon. He laid the nose of his water-spouting dragon carefully in the gutter beside the stone steps of the sightless house opposite the wine-shop, and wiping his hands and forearms on a large plaid handkerchief was proceeding without haste toward The Mouth.

"Good morning, Maximilian Gobin," Boul addressed him respectfully. Head averted, nose in air, Maximilian Gobin went his way, and while deliberately failing to notice the *cocher*, incidentally failed to see a woman emerging unsteadily from the Café. She lurched against him heavily.

"Look where you are going!" she snarled, baring her teeth like an angry animal.

With an exclamation of disgust at the contact, Gobin brushed his sleeve and passed on into The Mouth.

She was handsome, or must once have been, for although she was still young, none of the freshness of youth remained on the olive face; her eyes smouldered under the level brows; her hair, dressed with great care, had the effect of the smoothly preened plumage of a black bird. A cheap crocheted shawl was dragged tightly over her shoulders, although the early August weather scarcely called for it, her feet were shod in list slippers. One might have mistaken her for a Spaniard. A superb black cat.

As she passed by the cabman, her eyes fixed on the ground in a vague stare, he spoke in a whisper, hoarse with the effort of remaining a whisper, while attracting her attention.

"Hey, Nana!"—showing her the Rat's stolen brooch in his sheltering palm. "Look what I've got here! How much do you suppose you can get for it, if I turn the job over to you?"

She took it mechanically from his hand, scarcely glancing at it.

"I don't know, but I'm going to keep half," she replied.

"All right. But it's *your* job—understand? I don't want you sending that young sister on the errand."

"I'll take no orders from you," she sullenly retorted.

"Very well, very well, but be careful," he urged, "the police have been very active here lately."

The woman crossed the alley to the drab house opposite The Mouth, slipping the brooch into her pocket as she ascended the stone steps which ran sidewise along the wall of the house, helping herself up by the iron railing that guarded them.

"Police!" she jeered. "I'm not afraid of the police! Let them take that swine to their slaughter house!" She tossed her chin in the direction of Gobin, issuing from the wine-shop, wiping his mustachios, and went her way through the dark doorway of the house.

"She means you, Maximilian Gobin," chuckled the old man.

Picking up his hose, Gobin returned to his work, giving voice to a desire to turn its cleansing stream upon all such street scum.

As with relief he watched the street cleaner withdrawing, Boul's eye was caught by an approaching pedestrian, one of a type rarely frequenting the Hole in the Sock. He came at a brisk business-like pace—a somewhat hard-visaged youth, slim, well-dressed and of modern appearance, looking what he

in fact, was, the well-paid subordinate of a well-paid official. As he approached, the Angelus bell overhead slowly boomed the hour. The cabman removing his shiny hat and holding it against his scarlet waistcoated stomach, lowered his head, and fell into devotions with zeal.

"Angelus Domini nuntiavit," he intoned and then, "Ave gratiae plena——"

Boul cast a sidelong glance to see whether his open-air service were properly impressing the young official, but that person was interested apparently in thoughts of his own. Arlette, however, stood now, broom in hand at the wine-shop door, and she had observed.

"Anybody might think you were religious, you old rascal!" she remarked. "Religious! *Boul!*"

"I am, young lady. I'm very religious. Not like Chico," Boul replied earnestly. "Do you suppose that young man wants a taxi?" he asked Arlette in a low tone. "Wouldn't it be just my devilish luck if he did, now that I can't get her started!"

The young man sauntered toward him. "Who are you, anyway?" he asked casually. "Did I hear some one call you Boul? That's an odd name."

"My parents gave it to me, because they always thought I'd come to the Boulevard—which I have

done," replied the *cocher* with pride. "I'd be there now, only Eloise is as stubborn as most ladies."

"Eloise—lady!" cried the officer with amusement. "So your cab is feminine and baffling! Ha, ha!" He turned with a more business-like expression to the vehicle. "How long have you been driving this machine, anyway?" he asked.

"Two days. I don't seem to understand her inwards."

"How long have you been stationed here?"

"All day, and it's now six. She's peculiar, I find."

"It's against the rules to stand like that. You've got to keep moving." The young man was so authoritative that Boul eyed him with sharp suspicion.

"Say, young man, are you the police?" he inquired anxiously, but was met with only a sharp rebuke.

"That doesn't concern you. What you're to do is to move on—be quick about it, too!"

"But what am I going to do? You may tell me the rule, and I may comprehend it, but if a lady puts her foot down—and that's what Eloise has done——"

"Why Eloise?" the young man smiled in spite of himself.

"I named her after my old horse Eloise. That's her shoe." He pointed fondly to a horseshoe nailed over the cab's door. Glowing with fond pride he explained that he had cherished so deep a fondness for that early Eloise that the second steed must bear her name. In the midst of his tender words, however, Boul now and then administered a kick, more emphatic than loving, to her mudguard, as the quarter most nearly corresponding to a horse's ribs.

While the discussion of Eloise and her temperament was going on between the two men, Arlette had been regarding the younger with an eye of recognition. When she heard him conclude the talk with a warning to Boul to "get along as soon as possible" she turned to him and thanked him heartily. Her father would be grateful, she said, as the taxi outside his door was a public nuisance.

"Always glad to oblige a lady," said the young man with a half courtly, half mocking glance in her direction; he, too, showed the flash of recognition.

Boul, administering another kick, bethought him of water. Perhaps a dose of that medicine would revive Eloise! He seized a pail and entered the wineshop, Arlette nodding a curt assent to his request.

Arlette and the young man faced each other alone.

"So! You! And is something going on?" she inquired with round eyes.

"Never mind. I'm here on business. All you need to do is to tell me whether the Colonel has been here, Arlette. You never miss anything that goes on, so you know!" he responded.

"Gracious! How exciting! No, he hasn't been here, but if he does I'm sure to see him. He'll be here again—today, Monsieur Recan?"

Recan nodded, replied in brief that the Colonel would be there later on with another gentleman and that she was to say nothing.

"And now for a drink," he said, and the two entered The Mouth.

CHAPTER IV

THE SISTERS

When Nana had entered the house, carefully avoiding the rickety staircase that lifted itself lamely to higher levels through the gloom, she felt her way along the narrow passage leading to the back of the ground floor. She advanced slowly, blinded partly by the darkness of the corridor, partly by the cloud brooding over her consciousness. She soon came bluntly against the door she was seeking, and fumbled at the handle. Unable to open it at once, she shook it, and then, without waiting, fell to beating against it with her fists.

"Open the door, Diane, if you don't want me to break it in," she shouted.

It was opened after a slight delay by a girl who shrank aside to let her pass.

"Locked me out! What do you mean, you imbecile?" cried Nana violently.

"I always lock the door when you are not here, Nana. You know I do. I am so afraid"—her voice trailed off, vague—pathetic.

"Afraid!" Nana sneered. "You have more reason to be afraid when I am here than when I am not —let me assure you." She glared at the girl. "You image of wax, that scarcely seem able to bring yourself to stoop from the heights of your superiority——"

"Oh, Nana," she interrupted. "I try—I try to do everything you want. I will do anything. But let us leave this place——"

"And go where, will you tell me? How many palaces are waiting to receive royal princesses like ourselves?"

"Is there no work to be had—no honest work? Need we go on like this? I can't even begin to take courage. Every hour I feel myself sinking deeper into despair—and then those things that you make me go to Villeau's shop to sell! I tell him what you tell me to say. I tell him that they are the last things remaining to us from better days, and that we are obliged to part with them—but he doesn't believe it. He only has to look at me to know that it is not so. He knows that they are stolen."

"You viper!" screamed Nana. "Take it back, you thing that I have carried like a stone about my neck and kept from starvation ever since we left the

farm! Take it back, I say! You want to go and work—you want to be respectable! And how far do you think you would go without me? Get out of my sight, before I tear your eyes out of your sniveling face! Get out!" she thundered in a voice so dangerous that the girl made a rapid dart toward the door.

The sight of her prey in flight seemed to add fuel to the rage burning in Nana's veins. Picking up a long, snakelike whip from the table, she lurched after her with murder in her eyes.

In terror, Diane fled down the corridor, but her feet were weighted by the same terror which urged her onward. "Nana, please—Nana, please—" she gasped with each step.

Overtaking her, Nana hurled her brutally out of the house. She was spun by the blow backward against the iron railing enclosing the head of the outer steps. As she hung there, with powerless arms over the rail on which her head rested, she continued her terrified, mechanical protest—"Nana, please—please!"

Nana, towering over her, grasped her by the throat. "Take it back, Diane! Take it back, I tell you!"

"I do—I do!" came Diane's halting whisper.

Triumphantly Nana threw the whip backward into the house. She laughed shortly. "Now, take this to Villeau's and bring me absinthe for it." She thrust the Rat's brooch into the girl's hand.

"No—no!" Diane pleaded.

Clutching her by the shoulders Nana jerked her forward, bringing their faces close together. Into the eyes so near hers, she spoke in a voice quiet, though shaken with passion. "You'll do as I tell you!"

"Yes, but Nana, it makes you so terrible," Diane whispered.

"I'll break your head open!" Nana's voice was still low, but her hand closed over Diane's throat.

"You're killing me!" cried the girl. With an effort she wrenched herself away and tottered to the foot of the steps, where she cowered in a heap, motionless but for the sobs that shook her.

Boul, who had some time since gone in search of a pail of water in the wine-shop, was at this moment filling Eloise's radiator. He glanced over his shoulder, his sympathetic heart dominated by his experienced head, which bade him not mix in the affairs of his neighbors, most especially the battles waged by females.

Attracted by the noise of the quarrel, Arlette had

also come out of the wine-shop; she seemed never to be stationed far from the door, an eye ever cocked and an ear ever pricked for the dramatic sights and sounds of the alley.

"Diane!" Nana called to the huddled figure. "Get up!" Diane did not move. "Do you want me to come down to you, then?" Nana threatened. Still no movement. "Diane!" The sound was such as a wolf might make. It was sufficient to rouse the girl at the foot of the steps. Wearily she half rose. "No—no, Nana—I'll go."

Satisfied that she was about to be obeyed, Nana turned back into the house. Very slowly Diane got to her feet. The weight of her misery seemed to bow her. She found it impossible to stand upright. She crept away from the steps, a pitiable thing, bent almost at a right angle, as if crouching away from an expected blow.

"Why don't you fight her back?" Arlette suggested tartly as Diane approached her.

"I can't," Diane whispered.

"I wish she'd try that whip on me once. I'd push it down her throat." Arlette appeared entirely capable of doing so.

"Oh," moaned Diane, "it's because I'm afraid of her."

"If she wasn't your sister," Arlette spoke with the evident aim of making herself distinctly audible to anyone in the neighborhood interested in hearing, "I'd tell the police!"

Galvanized by the word, Boul leaped over a keg lying on the edge of the sidewalk, the sooner to stop such seditious talk at its sources.

"Police!" His exasperation raised his usual base to a high treble, "And get us all into trouble? You've horrible ideas, you. Listen," he turned with a paternal gentleness to the other girl, "I wouldn't try to cross Nana when she's like this—when she's been drinking. Papa Boul's your friend —" His hoarse croak was softened by an endearing sincerity.

"Friend!" Arlette registered dramatic scorn. The young girl was, at this stage of her acquaintance with Boul, totally unimpressed by any endearing quality whatsoever in him.

She saw in him only the driver of a wicked old chariot, bearing dubious freight to questionable places in the secret hours of the night. She did not realize, (how many people did in the beginning of August, 1914?) that an old scapegrace capable of stealing pennies out of a blind man's dog's cup might be equally capable of giving his life to save

that same blind man's—or, for that matter, his dog's. The "old thief" as she had called him, this taxi-cranking thieving cur, a thievish nuisance was to her, and he was nothing more. At all events, Arlette swept by him now, toward her own doorway, in time to face Recan who was leaving it.

Recan's quick eyes taking in the scene, rested for a moment in scrutiny of Diane's pale profile.

"Arlette," he said hastily, "I may want some information from you about that girl."

"Oh, may you?" Arlette's deferential tone toward this respected young gentleman vanished on the instant. "Well, you won't get it!" Remaining for no argument, she left him without ceremony and re-entered the shop.

"I won't, eh?" he laughed drily. "Then I shall have to find out for myself," and he followed in the wake of Diane's receding figure.

CHAPTER V

THE HOLE IN THE SOCK RECEIVES VISITORS

At about the same time, two men were approaching the Hole in the Sock. They might have stood for the human embodiments of the City Mouse and the Country Mouse of Aesop's fable, so clearly marked was one as the man of Paris; the other as the man of the Provinces. Monsieur Blonde, a country lawyer, come to town on the business of prosperous country clients, was a spare, elderly man, clad in an ill-fitting frock coat; a broad-brimmed soft hat was set somewhat far back on his head, leaving a clear view of a lean face, innocent of hair except for the shaggy eyebrows shading shrewd old eyes.

As different a human specimen was Colonel Brissac as is, among dogs, one French poodle from another French poodle: the one fresh from the attentions of a superlative barber, clipped and shaven, brushed and shiny, beribboned and perfumed—the other in his natural coat, a shaggy mat of strings and lumps—two dogs of notably differing breeds being little more different one from the other. Colonel

Brissac wore the immaculate civilian's clothes of a delightful cut, in a delightful manner—and just as he wore them, he seemed, as it were, to wear himself; he took them and himself not too seriously, but with a very keen enjoyment of and liking for both. He was slender and shapely, as if with the purpose of better exhibiting his apparel. He had reached his early forties and the most enviable of all ages they seemed, as carried by him, humorously, easily, jauntily, charmingly.

The two men were attended on their way through this low quarter by a bodyguard of two *gendarmes* following at their heels. They filled the distance between the stranger's modest hotel and their destination with talk of politics, of war—the universal topics.

When they had arrived at the Blind Alley, Brissac turned to the *gendarmes,* dismissing them with thanks.

"You are quite sure that you will no longer need us, Colonel?" the elder official asked with a show of anxiety.

"Quite." Brissac, definite, smiling, bowed, and the *gendarmes* withdrew with a salute, although reluctantly. They knew the Hole for a sink of iniquity.

Monsieur Blonde had been gazing in frank dismay at his suroundings; indeed he displayed something like awe at such an excess of unsavoriness in walls, in pavement, in the very air. The Colonel, meeting his questioning eyes, explained that they were in a *cul de sac*, or bag. As the name implied, no one could pass through.

There was a suggestion of trap about the word "bag." As if to add to all the unsavory details the additional one of unsavory humanity, the Rat at this moment rose out of the sewer trap at Monsieur Blonde's very feet, and after a rapid blink at each of the gentlemen trotted nimbly out of the alley, the bit of rope which fastened some article of his clothing dangling below his blouse nearly to the ground behind him, eminently suggestive of a rat's thin tail.

"The creature looks like some sort of animal, and yet not quite one!" exclaimed the lawyer. "Is it possible that he—it—is human?"

The Colonel laughed lightly. "Strange specimens one finds in these nether regions of Paris. Nether regions, indeed, in this case, for that is none other than one of the city scavengers. They inhabit the sewers, cleaning them. And he is only one of many strange types."

Monsieur Blonde looked nervously about, wiping the chill of fear from his face with a large pocket handkerchief. "Can we get on, so as to continue our quest for the two sisters——" he urged politely.

"But that is just what we've done in coming here." Brissac pointed to the house directly in front of them. "That is their home."

Shock was written all over the lawyer—"Not that horrible place," he cried. "Surely that is impossible!"

Brissac shrugged. "Nothing is impossible, my dear friend—in Paris. There, in that dreary house before you, live the two sisters whom you are seeking. They occupy one room."

"*Mon Dieu!* And these girls, young and pure, were brought up in a home of purity and charm! It was a simple home, it is true, and devoid of luxury. But it was the home of the fairly comfortable middle-class and every decency surrounded them. It is incredible that they have sunk so low!" He shook his head mournfully.

"Ah, Paul," cried the Colonel, at this moment catching sight of Recan who had come up behind him and was standing at his elbow. "This is Monsieur Felix Blonde."

The Colonel explained to his subordinate that the

gentleman was the lawyer who had come on a mission to town to seek the two girls whom Recan had been watching. He had been commissioned by the uncle of the girls, and the success of his efforts was due, as Brissac added good-temperedly, to the efficiency of this young secretary of his who had been trailing them down over a considerable period. Monsieur Blonde thanked the young man earnestly and grasped his hand in a friendly, if slightly pompous manner.

Brissac now made brisk and business-like inquiries of his assistant, which elicited the information that Paul had been able to obtain full records of the two girls from the Police Department. In fact, he had them to show—he produced them. He stated, further, that the elder sister was at present in her room, but the younger was out.

A sharp exclamation came from Brissac. How could so efficient a secretary have let the younger escape, and at a critical moment!

But the secretary smiled, aware of not being undeserving of his reputation for brilliancy and efficiency. She was being watched, he assured his superior. She was, at that moment, in a shop at the head of the lane—or soon would arrive there. No mouse

could slip down its hole while he was the observant cat! She was to be brought at once to Brissac.

The Colonel, however, preferred for the present to deal with the older sister alone. His first impulse was to enter the house and interview her there; he stopped, meditatively inspecting its inscrutable face; then he made a humorous grimace. "No," he said. "Bring the girl out here to us, Paul."

Brissac had put his entire staff at the disposal of Monsieur Blonde since that gentleman's arrival on his search at the Vulmirs' request. The Colonel had dropped his own important affairs, and had given the matter his entire attention. For one thing, he was a politician, and believed in cementing friendships. But besides, there was an element of romance in the affair which appealed to the boy within him—the boy that it within every man's soul. For the tale in a word was this. Monsieur Georges Vulmir had become a rich man, and in the most sudden and dramatic fashion. He and his wife, now living in affluent circumstances, had determined to renew the search for their nieces which they had attempted before, and, with abundant money at their command, to see it through now to a successful issue.

Not long after the disappearance of the sisters from the old white farm house, a great change had begun in the Vulmirs' circumstances. Georges had given increasing attention to the pearl industry, with the result that he had gone to the South Seas to engage in the business, and had made money as if by magic. The old house had been closed, the lonely couple had taken another residence while the husband should travel, and the search, which at first had been made frantically but rather helplessly, had lapsed. They were ignorant of the fact that the girls had once thought of returning, but had been told that aunt and uncle were gone from the country.

Now the fortune was made, the master of the old farm house was ready to retire to wife and comfort for the rest of his days. Why should these two, so prosperous and yet so dreary, not have the comfort of daughters to cheer their old age? Surely if the girls were living they could be found! And who could better undertake the search than their good old friend, Blonde, who would add a strong personal interest to his efficiency?

Thus had Felix Blonde come to Paris. Brissac the clever Parisian, knew the whole story and had taken a half-cynical, half-youthful pleasure in play-

ing a part in the little drama. It was now ready for its first great climax: the bringing forth of Nana to meet her one-time friend, the family lawyer.

While they waited, Brissac glanced over the Police reports which Recan had put into his hands. They showed the two young women in a rather unpleasant light, to be sure, and he frankly informed Blonde of the fact. One of the girls had plainly fallen into bad ways. Of the other he could not be sure. Would this have any serious effect upon the girls' uncle, he wondered—and so spoil this interesting little drama? What sort of a man was the uncle, anyway? he wondered aloud.

The lawyer shook his head. "I tremble to say that he is a religious man. He is honorable, scrupulous, noble. But he is a Calvinist of the old type, and that means no compromise. What would he say if he knew that his nieces had come to this?"

"But he must not know it!" Brissac exclaimed. "It's impossible. Of course he would never forgive them. If we let him know the truth, the girls won't have a ghost of a show if he's the kind of old-time Calvinist I know. Here comes the older girl. To be frank, she doesn't look exactly the sort that a very conservative and highly proper family would care to welcome to its bosom, does she?" he added

as Nana, followed by Recan, came forth from the house.

The kind old lawyer looked at her with startled recognition. His sympathy went forth on the instant. "And Nana used to be the picture of health!" he cried. "She was the stronger of the two. And now she is almost an invalid!"

Brissac's worldwise eyes made a different diagnosis. "My friend, if you knew Paris as I do you would recognize the absinthe victim at a glance," he responded.

Nana's face was, in fact, like a page upon which the ugly truth is written in characters black and easy to read. It was intermittently convulsed by a nervous twitching, distorting it into hideous lines. She seemed to have no face, but to be unconsciously assuming a series of masks, all equally repellant.

Recan pushed her roughly forward down the steps toward the two men. She advanced unresisting. At sight of Brissac she stopped, suddenly frightened, then defiant. She wasn't to be dragged around at everyone's beck and call, and she'd have them know it. With angry exclamations she stared at Brissac.

The colonel met her anger with calm. He ordered his secretary to watch the entrance to the

A William Fox Production. *Seventh Heaven.*

CHICO IMPRESSES UPON BOUL THAT HE IS A REMARKABLE FELLOW.

Hole, lest they be disturbed, and then turned to the sulky girl with a manner as courteous as though he had been addressing a charming lady. Would she be so obliging as to tell them her name? Nana, not to be disarmed, continued a suspicious survey of him. After a moment's hesitation, borrowing the name nearest to her memory's clouded surface, "Arlette du Fois," she said.

"No, that is not your name."

Nana started at the unexpected voice behind her. She turned, and was confronted by Monsieur Blonde. The shock of the sight of an old-remembered face helped to clear her thoughts. They flew back to the little garden behind her uncle's white farm house. She saw her uncle and this man sitting near the arbor . . . the interminable strong cigars, the tiny cups of strong *café noir*, the *petits verres* of cognac; . . . talk of voyages, cargoes, investments, politics. . . . Her aunt endlessly knitting or mending white socks. . . . The little green door in the wall behind the lilac bushes and the pear tree . . . Good old Ami, her friend indeed, who never barked or made a noise, no matter how late she came back . . . The Tavern, men drinking, carousing. . . . One, a seafaring man, rough, masterful, fascinating in his brazen and coarse way, who had been stirred

for the moment by her black beauty—had brought her, with Diane, to Paris, and then had grown tired of her and disappeared forever, leaving the girls to fend for themselves. . . .

She caught her breath and retreated a step, murmuring the name of Blonde.

He looked at her sternly, commanding her to give her true name.

"Nana Vulmir," she reluctantly confessed and Blonde nodded assent.

He then laid before her his errand in brief. How he had been sent to help her—to play the part of friend—and how Brissac had kindly assisted him.

But Brissac belonged to those whom Nana regarded as hostile—the representatives of the law in Paris. Taking instant alarm she started away, her first impulse being to make her escape by leaving the alley. Recan, however, stopped her before she had taken many steps. At Brissac's assurances that he meant her no harm, the girl sank back into her morose lounging posture, protesting, nevertheless, that she was a good girl, she had done no wrong.

Brissac's only reply to this was a quizzical glance at the records in his hands. He paused, looked sharply at her; then, of a sudden, be brought forth his startling news:

"Your uncle Georges is a rich man now, and he has sent to get you to come back to him. You will live in comfort, even luxury."

It was a dramatic moment. Under the shock of the sudden announcement, Nana's clouded brain groped, reeled, groped again. She sank back against the barrel; her hands went up to her face, pressing her eyes and forehead. She was endeavoring to let all that she heard penetrate, sink in, become real to her.

Swiftly pushing the drama toward its happy conclusion, Brissac scribbled on a card the address of the Hotel St. Roc, Rue Caumartin. There, he explained, were the aunt and uncle, awaiting the arrival of the girls. She was to pack her things and take her sister there at once, for the reunion.

Although the first shock of the wonderful news had dazed Nana, her second reaction was to come to her senses. It struck like a blow, and in the end she was sobered by it. She raised her head now, looked around with an expression of dawning joy.

Uncle Georges was rich! He wanted her and Diane back! He had forgiven all! The black years of poverty and struggle were over at last!

But the happy ending of the long, unhappy story was not as simple as it at that moment appeared.

For, not realizing the outcome of such a message, Blonde had telegraphed to Vulmir that he and the sisters would meet him and his wife at the sacristy door of the Church of the Heavenly Angels immediately after six o'clock. He had not then known what sort of a locality this was—he merely had the address from Brissac.

And so, while her aunt and uncle made ready to come to meet her, Nana made ready to go to them. She inspected herself in a small mirror produced from a rusty leather bag hanging from her waistband. She patted her hair tentatively. Was she so very much changed, she wondered, as she looked into the mirrored eyes; had the life of the last few years set their stamp too unmistakably, indelibly on her features? Would her foster parents know at a glance? Would they believe what she would devise to tell them? What was she, in fact, to say to them—? The questions rose like bubbles to the surface of her consciousness and floated there. But at any rate, she would manage. She would make up a good tale to tell them. A few lies—easy enough! Whitewash her past, and all's well!

CHAPTER VI

PERE CHEVILLON

While awaiting Paul's return with the younger sister, whom curiosity and a feeling for symmetry alone suggested his remaining here to see, Brissac placed a cigarette in his long, amber holder, lighted it, and strolled to the steps of the sacristy door, where he stood in the shadow of its arch, for a few moments, quietly smoking.

His attention was presently attracted, for lack of anything more interesting, by the sight of Boul leaving the wine-shop with an air both jocund and stolid. He was a droll type, thought Brissac, taking note of Boul's warty, incendiary nose, his twinkling eyes, the humorous twist of his mouth, which could on occasion assume a pucker so sanctimonious.

From his vantage point in the doorway, Brissac suddenly saw the Rat scuttle into the alley from the lane.

A little pantomime took place before the spectator's amused eyes more rapidly than it could be related.

The Rat held in his hand a fat silver watch with its accompanying heavy silver chain. This he slipped into the expectant outstreched hand of Boul, who with one engulfing gesture stuffed it into his own pocket, while with the other hand he stuffed the Rat into Eloise's interior and shut the door.

A clamor of rapidly approaching voices had accompanied this sleight-of-hand performance, a clamor which resolved itself into cries of "Stop thief," and "Catch him!" From this lane into the alley now entered a Sergeant of Police. His headlong progress was materially retarded by a short, rotund little priest who was not only following hard upon his heels, but hanging back with all his weight upon the Sergeant's coat tails. His spectacles dangled from one ear, this being but one of various marks of the disarray caused by haste and conflict.

The Sergeant was impatiently trying to free his coat from the priest's obstinate clutch, protesting that he could catch the thief and arrest him if he were free to do so, while the priest still clung, protesting in his turn that he wanted to explain the situation. The perspiring Man of God, finally managing to plant himself in front of the Sergeant, while still failing to loosen his hold on the coat tail, then very

clearly announced in a mild roar that he didn't want the thief arrested at all!

But how could this be? the dazed Sergeant demanded. The rascal had stolen the good Father's watch!

The good Father's voice, still pitched in a high key, and still emphatic, was shaken with a gurgle of fat laughter, laughter so infectious that Brissac, who had descended the sacristy steps and pushed his way through the thin crowd of bystanders attracted by the commotion, perforce joined in, although he did not as yet know what the joke might be.

"And then, will you believe it," said Brissac when he related the story later on, "the little priest, still gurgling with merriment, explained that the watch was without value—that it was made of tin! It seems that he uses tin watches as a bait—buys them by the dozen at the Bon Marché—catches the thieves with them, and, when he has found out who they are, converts and baptizes the rascals! He actually dipped into his pocket and drew out a bunch of the watches dangling on conspicuous chains, the better to attract his fish to the bait!"

There was a hearty laugh among the club men to whom Brissac was telling the tale.

That's a priest after my own heart," he went on. "I thought to help him a bit, so I stepped up to the broken-down taxi where I knew that sewer rat to be hiding, and pulled him out by the ear. The Father laughed heartily as he looked at his helpless victim. He evidently doubted whether he could ever make a saint out of such raw material!"

The jolly priest did, perhaps, doubt such success, but he was not going to give up without an effort. The abject figure of the Rat huddled there before him, and, after he had enjoyed his laugh, he turned to him with kind questions. What was his name, and where did he work? His catechism elicited the information that the Rat's true name was Pierre and that he had worked in the sewer with Chico.

Chico! At sound of the name the priest was all attention. Chico! At last he was on the track of his rescuer. Over and over he had made inquiries, he had tried to trace the brave young knight who had popped up from under the very earth and saved him. Chico!

"How I have looked for him!" he exclaimed. "Please go and bring him here, won't you?" he asked of the Rat. He turned to Brissac and related the story of that rescue—how a scavenger named Chico, a most daring young fellow, had risen, the

ground opening, like St. Aloysius and snatched him from death.

The Rat, alarmed by the disturbing purifying atmosphere of a genuine priest, was eager to be off, but the Holy Father held him to repeat his request. He wanted Chico brought to him at once; let him be told that Pere Chevillon, the new priest here at the Heavenly Angels, was his friend and had something to give him. To the Rat's protesting murmur that Chico didn't like priests because he was an atheist, the Father only responded gently, "And an atheist saved a priest's life!"

"And as for you, you must reform and pick no more pockets!" he cried to the Rat who was now vanishing down the sewer trap. He raised his voice in mock thunder like a grown-up threatening a child with a bugaboo. He would follow him, he declared, to the depths of the sewer, and there purify him!

The priest and Brissac, left to themselves, warmed in a hearty laugh.

"Never have I met as jovial and as human a Man of God," Brissac told his friends at the club. "He took a pinch of snuff and laughed again, and his laugh was utterly infectious! Then he fell to discussing the situation of these men in the sewer. It

seems he has interested himself in them, and he believes that if they had work up in the open air and sunshine it would save their souls. So—well, you know that a politician can never have too many friends. One in the robes of the priesthood might not come amiss. The upshot was—I gave him a card on which I wrote that he was to have the privilege of appointing men to the street cleaning service whenever he saw fit. He was overjoyed."

It was indeed true. Pere Chevillon stood gazing upon the potent slip of cardboard in his hand. His at last to confer a blessing upon these poor beloved children of his—the blessing of God's good sunshine!

CHAPTER VII

DIANE

When Diane had crept away from the alley, still shaken and numb from her fright, she dragged her steps along the lane in the direction of Villeau's shop at the corner of the Boulevard, a gloomy little place, made dark by the many objects hanging close to the glass of the show window. They were articles of many sorts—clothing, household furnishings, with here and there an ornament—jewelry, or porcelain. Each seemed to remain in its place and position week after week, season after season, and appeared rather to be intended as a curtain to screen the shop's interior and the doings of its inmates than to be exhibited as an inducement to entrance therein for the purpose of purchase. Not an inviting place.

Not an inviting person, Monsieur Villeau. He looked, perhaps, like a dish of bread pudding studded with raisins. But bread pudding with many raisins is a pleasant sight which Monsieur Villeau was not. His eyes, moreover, were so poorly

matched that it was ever an uncertainty to persons looking at him whether they were being looked at in return.

Diane's distaste for entering the shop was only less than her dread of returning to Nana with the brooch and without the absinthe. It would take courage to do the latter. For the former it took a form of sturdiness which she could not at the moment command. She walked by the shop's door and up the Boulevard, to give herself time to recover the stomach for facing Monsieur Villeau's pastiness, his spottiness, his squinting leer.

Presently, having very slowly walked for perhaps ten minutes away from the lane, she turned to retrace her steps. Preoccupied though she was, she was vaguely aware that two men, one a few paces behind her, and the other walking almost abreast, though slightly in front of her, and to the left, halted, turned when she did, and also retraced their steps. Both men fell in behind her. Sudden alarm chilled her flesh and confused her thoughts. Villeau's shop immediately appeared to her in the light of a refuge—the nearest spot where she might come to cover. She hastened forward, reached the door, entered, and closed it quickly behind her. A bell jangled as she opened the door. Monsieur Vil-

leau appeared almost simultaneously from behind a wall of musty overcoats hanging above the end of the short counter and screening the door leading to a room behind the shop.

Diane held out her hand toward him, the brooch in its palm. She was about to speak, but had she had time to say the first word, the sound of her voice must have been drowned by a second peal of the bell which had but just relapsed into silence since her entrance.

Monsieur Villeau glanced in the direction of the door, and the inscrutable and mulish blankness overspreading his face was sufficiently significant to cause Diane to look over her shoulder. She might have known—of course—they *had* been following her. The trembling hand holding the brooch toward Monsieur Villeau closed sharply and she was about to hide it in the pocket of her skirt, when in a twinkling, by what seemed a piece of neat legerdemain, the man who had entered held the brooch in his own hand. There had been no struggle. Diane had neither will nor skill to cope with one who had both. Neither did she remonstrate, her one impulse being to dart out of the shop and back to the Hole in the Sock.

Monsieur Villeau made no sound, he merely

stared, whether at the new arrival or at the violin hanging on the opposite wall, it was impossible to determine. The man who now held the brooch said nothing, nor did he seem in haste to make the next move, and Diane, not waiting to see what this might be, slipped undetained like a shadow out of the shop into the lane, and fled in the direction of the Sock. Aware that one of the two men who had been shadowing her on the Boulevard must have waited for her outside of Villeau's shop and was now close at her heels, she broke into a run as she neared her house. She was not many feet from its doorsteps when she ran blindly into Brissac, still standing hat in hand, gazing reflectively at the sacristy door, through which Pere Chevillon had but now disappeared. Like a bird fluttering in a snare, she then turned back toward the lane in hope of retreating in that direction, but her pursuer—it was Paul Recan—barred the way.

"No, you don't," he said, with a faint, scornful smile.

Diane's hands dropped to her sides helplessly. She stood quite still, her head hanging with a surrendering droop that threw her short red gold hair forward in a veil about her face.

"Is this the younger sister, Paul?" she heard Brissac ask.

"Yes, Colonel. She was caught trying to sell this." Paul handed Brissac the brooch which his agent had so neatly subtracted from Diane's hand. Then turning toward her, "Look up, you!" he said sharply as he thrust her forward toward his chief.

Obediently she looked up into Brissac's face. Recan's rough push had caused her to raise her head with a nervous jerk which tossed her red-gold mane backward, away from her forehead.

There was an appreciable pause before Brissac spoke.

"Are you sure that this is the young woman, Paul?" he asked with unexpected gentleness.

"Yes, Colonel, this is Diane Vulmir."

Brissac made no answer; he did not even look in Recan's direction, but made a slight gesture with head and hand, which Recan understood to signify that he was for the moment dismissed.

The Colonel's eyes had not left Diane's. Her gaze was still fixed upon him. He regarded her thoughtfully, taking in every detail of that poignantly appealing face; the ivory pallor and smoothness of her skin, the tragic lift of the brows, which should be level if her spirit were not tormented, he

thought; the grey mystery of her great eyes; the mournful droop of the generous lips;—the delicacy of the straight nose, which started with statuesque boldness from between the eyebrows and ended in such a provocative tip;—the clear, deep line of the jaw and chin—

Good heavens, how beautiful she was! Or would be, thought Brissac, if she did not remind one of a classic mask of Tragedy. If she were at peace with herself and the world she would resemble an angel in a stained glass window, with the sun shining through—perhaps an angel with a flaming sword—with that wide and noble brow, that blaze of gold hair. Strangely beautiful, he reflected, and was astonished at his own reflections.

He roused himself from his absorbed scrutiny. Somehow it grated upon his finer sensibilities to put the question to her. And yet he must. Yes, he must interrogate her as he would any other suspect. He must ask her if she was a thief.

She looked up at him as a simple, innocent child might look and denied it.

He drove himself on. Then where did she get it? he persisted—the brooch in his hand. She trembled and hung her head, the screen of her hair hiding her face from him.

Colonel Brissac bit his lip, coughed. This thing got on his nerves, he growled to himself. If she were the usual type—but this frail creature! One doesn't like to ask such questions of an angel in a stained glass window.

He coughed again, then endeavored to speak as to a little child. He told her that she must not fear him, who desired to be her friend, but she must realize that it is as wrong to sell a stolen article as to steal it in the first place. He suspected that this brooch *was* stolen, and, if so, he asked that she tell him who had sent her on the errand of selling it. But, he assured her again, he meant no cruelty. He would not even compel her to tell the other's name.

Shaking with terror, her teeth chattering, Diane could not answer. But one question surged forward in her mind. Looking into his eyes beseechingly, as a lost soul might look, she moaned it:

"Are you going to send me to prison?"

Brissac felt his voice grow husky as he looked at the shrinking creature before him. He took her by the arm, led her to the house steps and seated her there.

And there, in a long, quiet talk, these two strangely contrasted members of society became friends. It was a friendship that was to ripen

strangely in time to be. Speaking gently, even soothingly, as to a terrified child, Brissac told Diane the wonderful fairy story in which she played so important a part. He told her of the aunt and uncle with whom she had lived—she stared in blank astonishment that he knew so much, but he laughed and assured her that fairy godfathers know everything. He told her what Nana already knew—of the wealth that had come to this good old couple and of their desire to claim the girls as daughters once more. They were in Paris, they were seeking the sisters through their old lawyer whom Diane doubtless remembered—they were prepared to give the girls every luxury, to complete the dazzling fairy tale as though it had all happened in a book instead of in real life.

Nana had grasped greedily at the idea of wealth, had promptly arranged to hide her unsavory past and to accept with delight what the gods had sent. But, strangely, Diane showed only troubled amazement—no glow of happiness filled her eyes.

Brissac saw her perplexity.

"But surely you are delighted? You must be thrilled, are you not?" he demanded.

Suddenly Diane buried her face in her hands. "It's—too late!" she cried. "Too late! They will

cast us off if they know what our lives have been. And we can't tell them lies."

Brissac smiled and shrugged. This was all very well, he told her, but after all, one must be philosophical. It would only disturb the happiness of a worthy old couple to tell them the whole truth—

Diane, rising and going toward the steps of her home, assented in apathetic quiescence. Perhaps he was right; perhaps the aunt and uncle should be kept in the dark; but the situation left her full of forebodings. She could not leap to the joy of it. Life had taught her bitter lessons; she could no longer believe that it held any happier days.

But as she paused in climbing the steps and looked back over the iron railing into Brissac's upturned face, she met his smile. His eyes were merry, beaming with good will.

"Come, you are young—younger, far, than I am, and I am happy!" he cried. "So, by all the law, you should be happier still!"

She could not help returning his smile. Through all her gloom she caught a whiff of his mood. A gleam of playfulness shot into her face.

"And here you are playing fairy godfather to me, and I thought you had come to arrest me!" she cried almost gaily.

He laughed now with boyish delight. His little drama was working out to a happy issue, after all! Brissac had become quite obsessed by the romance of the whole affair.

Now, he cried to her, all would be well. If only she would smile and rejoice. It was true—the aunt and uncle awaited her at the Hotel—he gave her the address—the girls were to pack their things and go there at once. And his last word of advice to her was—be happy!

A lamplighter had within the last few moments of deepening dusk lighted the street lamp hanging by a crane at the corner of the house; its rays fell on Diane's shining hair, on the pearly teeth, on the glowing and tender eyes.

"Be happy," he repeated, "for when you smile, you are very lovely—yes, you are beautiful!" he ended simply as he looked deep into her eyes.

The happy smile did not fade, as Brissac, stooping over her hand, kissed it. She turned toward the door, but paused for a moment in the doorway with a last look of gratitude.

"*Au revoir,* sweet child." He lifted his hat as she disappeared, his face still alight with a smile which was, it must be owned, not very far removed from tears.

CHAPTER VIII

THE VULMIRS ARRIVE

For the better part of the last half hour, Monsieur and Madame Vulmir had been standing by a small door in the elevation of the Church of the Heavenly Angels on the other side of the one bounding the lane that skirted the alley of the Hole in the Sock. They had stood on the Boulevard in front of the church for a moment of hesitation on their first arrival, questioning whether to look for the sacristy door to the right or to the left of the church; the lane to the right looking a shade clearer, wider, cleaner, they had gravitated toward it, and coming presently upon a small door had jumped to the conclusion that this must be the one they were in search of. Seeing nothing of Monsieur Blonde, they stood for a while in quiet anticipation of his speedy arrival.

It did not require many minutes of waiting to bring about in Monsieur Georges Vulmir a state of restless impatience.

"Why could Blonde not be on time! He said

six o'clock, or as soon after as *we* found convenient. We arrived at six. Why cannot people do as they say!"

"Few people are as punctual as you, dear Georges," Madame Vulmir soothed him, "and Monsieur Blonde has undoubtedly been unavoidably detained—Paris is so bewildering—" she ended disconnectedly.

The years had dealt gently with Valentine. Her hair was silver, but her face still held its charm. She was dressed with care, prettily although without style, in rustling dark green taffeta, full skirted and lace frilled. Her abundant hair was confined by a lace bonnet tied not without coquetry under her chin. She was what many years of marriage to Georges Vulmir had made her—pleasant, mild, most obedient as a wife, and as an individual more valuable for good will than for intelligence.

Monsieur Vulmir to those who knew him but slightly seemed a harsh, domineering, irascible old tyrant. By one who chanced to be attached to him he would have been called a pillar of society, a man of sterling worth and integrity, upright if stern, just if something over assertive. He made a strange figure in his present setting, dressed as he was in pongee, with a brown straw hat, and carrying a

whalebone cane; tall, solemn, his face browned by the sun of the tropics. He might have been taken for a missionary.

Having examined the surroundings with a suspicious eye, he remained on the spot and restrained his mounting irritation only to entrench himself more securely with every passing moment in his position of general disapprobation. And he fumed the while—

"Where is that old donkey, Blonde! Where are those girls—what are they doing in such a neighborhood as this? I don't like it, Valentine, I like nothing about this entire situation"—and on—and on—and on—the good wife punctuating his remarks with corroborative echoes.

When waiting had reached a point of tedium past endurance, Monsieur Vulmir broke out in a fresh direction: "Has it occurred to you that perhaps this is not the entrance to the sacristy after all?" He went up to the low door, and tried to turn the heavy iron ring that formed its latch. He found it impossible to move.

"There must be another door," he decided. "I shall circle the church and discover for myself. I am sure this is the wrong place."

"Oh dear, I so fear to miss them—" sighed his lady.

"You are wrong, Valentine. I am convinced you are wrong." And he began his voyage of discovery around the base of the church as if it had been a coral island in the far Pacific. His journey around the apse end brought him in front of the sacristy door facing the Hole in the Sock.

"There, what did I tell you, Valentine? This lane runs alongs the other side of the church, don't you see?"

"I think you are right, dear," Valentine assented with relief.

"This must be the sacristy door. We were on the wrong side. I told you so."

"Yes, dear, you were right," she repeated.

"Now where's Blonde?" he raged, mopping his heated brow as he looked about him with acid disgust. "One can understand his not being at the wrong door—but why is he not here?"

"The note says to wait for him," murmured Madame Vulmir timidly.

"Wait! I won't wait another minute. That idiot is capable of any degree of asininity! As if it were possible that he had found our nieces in such a place—"

"Of course you are right, Georges, but let us not judge before we have seen them," she pleaded.

Not heeding her, Monsieur Vulmir had taken his protesting lady by the elbow and was on the point of marching her and himself out of the alley. "Come along," he said briefly.

But both stopped suddenly at sight of Diane, wraithlike, coming toward them, down the steps of the house across the alley.

Irresolute, she spoke in little more than a whisper when she neared them: "Uncle Georges—Aunt Valentine!"

"Diane!" cried the aunt, hastening forward and clasping her in her arms. "Diane! It is the little one, Georges—the Bebe, the dear one!" Tears streamed down her cheeks.

Over the kind lady's shoulder, Diane looked at Monsieur Vulmir, all her heart in her eyes, and while clasping her aunt with one arm, eagerly stretched out to him the other hand which he grasped.

"Uncle Georges!" she exclaimed. "I can't believe it's you—"

"See, Georges, our Bebe is a woman!"

Diane, folded in Aunt Valentine's arms, looked yearningly at her uncle, taking in all the details of

the well-remembered and beloved personality. She glanced down at his hand, which held hers. "I remember that ring—it's made of tortoise shell—" Such a trifle could conjure up a multitude of memories—!

Uncle Georges was moved, but not completely mollified, although Diane's old dominion over his heart-strings had instantly reasserted itself at sight of her. "You remember my ring—do you remember the prayers I taught you?"

"Yes—" said Diane, laying her head down and hiding her face in her aunt's kind, soft, ample bosom, a wave of almost unbearable weariness and homesickness breaking over her for the fresh and stainless past. "How good you smell—" she crooned. "Of sandalwood—and fresh linen—you smell of home!" Her breath caught in a sob.

Aunt Valentine answered with a little, broken laugh: "You hear, Georges? The little puppy—she smells her kind!" and then the good lady wept without restraint, while she and Diane stood clinging.

Uncle Georges would never have admitted that there was something alarmingly like a lump in his throat. "If you keep this up, you'll flood the Seine," he said gruffly.

"Of course, you are right—I mustn't—" Aunt Valentine disengaged herself gently and wiped her eyes.

"And where do you live, Diane?" asked Monsieur Vulmir suddenly.

"Why," Diane hesitated, "we live—" She stopped short, as her eyes fell on Nana who had appeared in the doorway and who, taking in the group at a glance, now ran down the steps.

"Uncle Georges! Aunt Valentine!" she exclaimed, summoning into her voice and face as much lightness and brightness and whiteness as she could assume. "How good to see you again!" She approached Monsieur Vulmir with assurance and kissed him enthusiastically on both cheeks before embracing Madame Vulmir.

"Is this Nana?" Monsieur Vulmir's dismay was none too flattering.

Paying no heed to it, Nana continued volubly, "But we were to meet you at your hotel. We should have been there very soon, but there are always little matters to attend to at the last moment. We were to go this evening."

Aunt Valentine, deaf to Nana's words, had drawn near to her, and was caressing her cheek. "Nana, my dear child, how pale you look—how ill—"

Neither had Uncle Georges taken notice of her glib remarks; he was scrutinizing the house out of which he had seen her come.

"You live in that house?" he asked with a frown.

The flow of Nana's chatter was not yet quenched. "Yes, Uncle Georges, and you have no idea how hard it has been to keep decent in a place like this." She amplified considerably and eloquently upon this theme.

"Yes," broke in Aunt Valentine, noting the grim mouth and steely eyes of her lord, "Yes, we understand, dear——"

"But we have kept decent, of course. Diane can tell you that—we have had a hard time—but we have kept decent—haven't we, Diane?" Nana was beginning to flinch under the chill stare of her uncle.

But no support, no answer, was forthcoming from Diane, who had sunk upon a wine keg in front of the Mouth. Monsieur Vulmir turned in her direction to account for her silence. All eyes were then focussed upon her—Aunt Valentine's in question—Nana's in menace—Uncle Georges' in scrutiny.

Nana hurriedly jumped into the breach again: "Poor child, she cannot bear to speak about it—she knows how we have had to struggle—how I have had to fight every step of the way to keep flesh and

bone together—and to protect her. You say I look ill—experience like mine leaves its traces upon the face—it carves grooves in the flesh—it dulls the eye—it takes away youth and light heart—it is well you came in time—" Nana went appealingly toward her aunt. She hoped that she was holding her own, even though Diane was a drag—no help at all. Her heart contracted in a spasm of hatred toward her.

Diane sat on her keg, doubled forward, arms hanging straight between her knees, face wet, and eyes staring Cassandra-like before her—foreseeing, but unable to avert, calamity to her own fortunes. Brissac's easy assumption that a discreet curtain could be drawn over the past, and that the two old people were to be duped as a matter of course, had not been more than momentarily convincing. How did one suppose that she could face her uncle if there were a lie in her eyes? He would see it—writhing like a tiny, uneasy creature, in their depths—and then "he would not love her ever again any more" as he used to threaten in the old days when she was a naughty child. No matter what the risk, what the consequences, she could not lie to him.

"We have had faith in you both, all the time, dear Nana," Aunt Valentine was saying consolingly.

"We knew the good blood of our family would keep you from harm."

"But it has not!" Diane's words cut the silence like the utterance of an oracle.

"Diane!" gasped Nana.

"What's that?" Uncle Georges was immediately on the scent.

"I said it had not kept us from harm—" Diane repeated mechanically.

"Don't listen to her!" cried Nana frantically. "She always imagines she has done wrong. *Mon Dieu*, the conscience of that child! She is full of piety—every trifle seems to her a crime—she—"

Diane rose suddenly and moved toward Nana. She seemed not to be acting from determination, from the promptings of the will. Here was not a courageous taking of the reins into her own hands. She seemed to move automatically.

"What's the use of lies?" she asked dully. "You would only find out sooner or later—" She turned to the old people who stood aghast.

"She doesn't mean that, Uncle Georges, she just imagines—" Nana pushed herself between Diane and the staring couple, trying to divert their thoughts by much clatter of tongue and waving of eloquent hands. "She always imagines herself the

last of sinners, she talks of expiating all sorts of imaginary crimes—I think she is mad on the subject—"

Perhaps the lady was protesting too much. Her uncle, with a sudden motion, waved her aside. "Be quiet, you," he said with emphasis. Then to Diane, "I want the truth, Diane—the truth, remember—"

"We have not been good."

Diane's answer was low and unhesitating, without plan or forethought. It was the unpremeditated expression of an upright nature, for a moment throwing off and forgetting fear of punishment, refusing to enter into a false situation leading she knew not whither.

"I knew it!" cried Vulmir. "I feared it all the time!"

"Wait, Georges," pleaded his wife. "Of course, you're right, but—" she put a protecting arm about Diane's bowed shoulders.

Vulmir, deaf to entreaties, advanced toward Nana. He shook his cane above her head, "Curse this Sodom and Gomorrah!" he raved. "Curse the both of you! Why, you—"

"Please, Georges, don't be angry—" Aunt Valentine was gentle and futile as always.

"Come away from here!" roared Vulmir, grasp-

ing his wife by the arm and turning to shake the dust of the scene from his feet forever.

Nana now added her entreaties to Valentine's. "Uncle Georges, let me explain—" Her words were no more effectual than the crackling of burning thorns in Vulmir's ears.

"More lies!" he spat back at her. "Come away, I tell you!" and he urged forward his remonstrating wife.

"We can't leave them like this—they are poor—" Madame Vulmir had finally found the shaft fitted to reach its mark. Releasing her, and taking from his pocket a few hundred franc bills, Vulmir threw them on the ash barrel close to Nana.

"There," he said, "let them have that. Come away from her—" he added, for Madame Vulmir, freed by his preoccupation with the money, had sped back to Diane and clasped her again to her bosom.

"But they are Ernestine's children, Georges." Acute anguish was now audible in her words.

"Do you mean to disobey me, Valentine?" Vulmir was formidable.

"No, Georges, of course not—" The habit of a lifetime is not easily set aside.

"Then do as I command. Not another word

A William Fox Production.

NANA PLAYS DIANE.

Seventh Heaven.

from you!" Vulmir turned upon Nana. "Not another word. Come away, Valentine!" With a look of cold hostility at Diane, he drew his weeping wife away, and led her protesting inarticulately out of the alley.

CHAPTER IX

BEAUTY IN DISTRESS FINDS A CHAMPION

After the Vulmir's departure, silence settled like a blanket over the alley for a prolonged space.

Diane dropped to the edge of the sidewalk, all strength oozing from her with her uncle's disappearance. She sat dazed, not yet taking account of the dire ruin brought upon herself by her almost involuntary confession.

Nana had stooped to pick up the money thrown down by Vulmir, counted it with deliberation and tucked it into the bosom of her dress.

Then she turned upon Diane.

Her face was so pale as to appear incandescent, and so terrifying that she might have stood for the head of Medusa, with arms set stiffly straight and close at her sides, hands clenched, she covered the distance that separated her from Diane in a slow, almost rhythmic glide, her eyes turned in an envenomed glare upon her sister, who sat rooted, frozen——

"Nana—Nana!" she whispered soundlessly; she

could find no voice. "Nana—please!" She made an effort to retreat, but her feet had turned to lead. Nana's approach was like that of death; it seemed to Diane as inevitable, as grim; she cringed before it.

As Nana neared her victim, one of her hands crept toward the other and pushed up her long sleeve. She still came closer—and now she was upon her! Her rigid hands slowly rose, and while one relentlessly pushed itself through Diane's hair, the strong fingers of the other closed about her throat.

Thus far, the freighted silence had been, as it were, audible, and movement had been so stealthy as to contain something of the element of silence made visible. Now, both silence and furtive motion were at an end, as the lull ceases upon the bursting of the hurricane. From one moment to the next, all was din and confusion in the alley. Diane's dumb immobility was converted into a struggle for life. As loudly and vehemently as she could, with Nana's strangling clutch upon her throat, she screamed and fought. She fell back, away from Nana, only to drag her forward with her on to the pavement, where both writhed in a shadowy bulk in the gutter, like a pair of wild animals in the jungle.

With the second scream, Boul had shot out of the

wine-shop, not a very certain and present aid in time of need, to be sure, but adding something to the animation of the fray by his excited cries of "Help! Help!" as he made vain attempts to drag Nana by the shoulders off her prey.

Various heads were thrust out of windows; a woman stole up the lane to the corner of the wine-shop, and peered curiously from behind Eloise at the combat, but no one was over-eager to mix in what was no one's concern but the combatants.

Meanwhile, Diane's struggles as well as her cries were becoming fainter. She was losing strength and consciousness. Her head lay motionless by the kerbstone—when of a sudden the sewer grating was pushed open from below, just beside her cheek, and from the nether darkness arose the Champion of Beauty in Distress!

Quite unaware of the rôle he was about to play, however, the young scavenger leaped out from the manhole on to the pavement, and stood for moment, hands on hips, the flash of a broad smile on his face, looking down at the two women.

"Hello!" he shouted. "What the devil!"

"She's killing her!" Boul's worry was only equalled by his fat and elderly uselessness in the capactity of rescuer.

The young man's brawn, his whip-cord muscles and his inches, entered as a new factor into the battle—like fresh reserves thrown in at the eleventh hour, saving the day.

Catching Nana by the back of the neck, the youthful giant easily lifted her as one might a cat by the same method.

"Stop that! Leave her alone!" he commanded, setting her down with a slight shake.

Nana turned her fierce wrath upon him; she hurled herself in his direction in a endeavor to scratch his face. But, suddenly catching both her wrists, he held them over her head, deftly kicked her feet from under her and slipped her body down into the manhole out of sight. There he held her, lightly laughing as he listened to her shrieks. She implored him not to drop her.

"Very well, then, my dear," he replied. "Let us have a little reason here. Will you promise—"

"I'll promise anything—only don't drop me!" broke in Nana.

"Good," laughed the man, lifting her out to safety and releasing her wrists. "Now, if I ever catch you abusing this woman—" he threatened with a formidable scowl, "I shall come for you, wherever

you are, and I'll drop you down the hole as quick as a wink!"

The terrifying youth made a lunge at her with his arms, while jumping high in the air. "Yah!" his blood-curdling roar sent Nana fleeing with all speed out of the lane.

When she was out of sight, the Avenger drew a large bandana handkerchief from a pocket of his huge velveteen breeches, and began wiping his face, and setting himself to rights. His clothes were worn and shabby, but his checked shirt and red sash were gay, and he rearranged the jaunty *beret* which he wore at the extreme side of his face.

"Whew!" the exclamation was eloquent. "Now, I ask you, Comrade Boul," he said, while continuing to mop his face and neck, "why the devil did I do that? It was no affair of mine. I am always doing the thing I don't want to do. Every time I come up out of the sewer I get into trouble."

Boul had, upon the arrival of assistance, lifted the unconscious Diane, and laid her along the mudguard of Eloise. He had covered her head and shoulders with an end of her black shawl, and was still hovering in her vicinity, occasionally fanning her with his hat.

The Rat had come up out of the sewer. "Chico's

always saving people's lives," he observed, catching the drift of affairs. "He saved the priest, and now he's saved that girl."

Chico glared at him. He didn't like to have his good deeds enlarged upon. "Hmp!" he growled. "And what were they worth, anyway? A priest—bah! And a creature like that! She might better be dead."

Dinner was now served. It might by some be called an informal function, the Rat producing the viands he had collected in his great canvas bag, but the debonair Chico turned it into a feast. The sausage, he announced, was truffles—by the magic of his own imagination. The cheese became *caviar de Russie,* the onion was the violets for decoration, and the bottle of wine was magically transformed into champagne. Boul appropriated the wine bottle, and opened it with care. The Rat peeled the onion, while Chico, with a thin clasp knife which he opened with a snap, cut the bread in thick portions against his breast.

Chico cracked many a joke as the feast began. Yet his cheer was not unclouded; something troublesome seemed to be gnawing within him. Although he had already seated himself on the edge of the sidewalk and prepared to fall upon his food, he

rose, and went over to the side of Eloise, on whose mudguard Diane still lay stretched motionless. He looked down at her with a wry face. She seemed very ill.

Chico turned to the Rat and called for the "Violet." The Rat handed him the peeled onion and Chico, holding it like a bottle of smelling salts under Diane's nose, laughed when she turned away from it and continued to move her head from side to side, as he pursued her nose with the insistent scent of his "violet."

"You are cured!" he exclaimed, ending his game. He gave the onion back to the Rat, and was about to seat himself again, when another thought presented itself; returning to Diane's side he shook her by the shoulder, commanding, rather than inviting, her to join them at dinner.

Diane faintly murmured her thanks but declined.

But no regrets would this hearty young host accept. Before she knew what had happened, poor Diane was set upon her feet, dragged to the group of merry diners, and there propped up upon the sidewalk against the Rat. Chico assumed the place of honor at the head of the "table."

Chico made one more effort to induce a guest to join them. This was Maximilian Gobin, haughty

wielder of the hose. As that mighty person, with his nose in the air, stalked past, "Come dine with us!" cried Chico heartily.

The nose rose higher. The Personage stalked on.

Chico rose and went forward at that. He introduced himself to the admired and envied Gobin; explained that he lived in an attic adjoining Gobin's, and felt that it would be agreeable to form a friendship. No response.

A scavenger was so lowly a person, in Gobin's estimation, that he was not even to be spoken to. Coldly he passed on.

For the moment Chico wilted. This, indeed, was a cut. But he rose to the occasion. "After all, what does it matter since I am such a remarkable fellow?" he demanded. "And"—proudly—"I'm an atheist as well!"

Conversation was restored, and the food and wine warmed the stomachs of the congenial group. Boul was stuffing in his food voraciously. The Rat was nibbling with small, quick, hungry bites like a rodent. Chico's healthy young appetite could not be quenched even by a snub from the Hose. As for Diane, lying half propped and too ill to eat, she, at any rate, did not disturb this bright occasion.

The talk, as often, fell upon Chico's belief—or

lack of it. Boul even endeavored to bring proof of the *bon Dieu* in whom he so confidently believed. Why, hadn't He proved Himself, by a true miracle? Boul had seen his old horse Eloise drop dead before him. He had faced starvation. He had prayed to St. Antoine for a taxi. Three days later his friend Albert had died and left him this machine!

Chico roared with laughter. So the good God had murdered Albert to give Boul a taxi, had He? A fine *Dieu*, indeed!

Chico then related the story of his three tests. "And so your *bon Dieu* owes me fifteen francs!" he was concluding, when forth from the sacristy door popped Pere Chevillon.

"Come, my son, I don't believe you really are an atheist!" said that little old priest with a friendly smile. He advanced toward the group, the Rat retreating in terror lest he be converted and baptized willy nilly.

The Father came forward cordially. "You are a fine, brave young fellow," he said to Chico, "to whom I owe my life. I overheard you saying that you don't like priests, and I'll admit that we do look rather like old crows. But perhaps you might like us better than you think, if you knew us better.

"You must forgive me for being an eavesdrop-

per," he went on. "But I was at the door of the church, and I heard what you were saying—heard the story of your three tests of *le bon Dieu.* You said that your greatest ambition was to be a street washer. What would you say to it if I made you one?"

Chico, who had met the priest with surly glances and mutterings to the effect that he was an atheist, and hadn't really meant to save a priest's life, and didn't want any thanks, and had no use for God, now stopped to listen. What was the old priest saying? What was that about street washing? Still sulky, lowering, but nevertheless curious, he listened.

"For," went on Pere Chevillon, "I am empowered to appoint any man I please to the street cleaning force—to the Hose. Take this card to the Commissioner, Chico, and the appointment is yours. You will, from now on, work in God's good sunshine!"

Chico stared, incredulous.

"It is true!" the priest reassured him, beaming. "And now I have one other gift for you. Here are some religious medals—of St. John and St. Agnes. I beg you to keep them always. They will protect you from harm and remind you of the very grateful old crow whose life you have saved."

And whether he liked it or not, he was going to pray for Chico, added the Father.

Chico threw back his head and met the prelate's eyes forbiddingly, but what was a helpless atheist to do? What weapons had he against that glance of genial understanding and of unconquerable good will? Chico looked at him dumbly. Pere Chevillon appreciated the humor of the situation. The old man's laugh was merry, as he walked away down the lane.

Chico followed him for a few halting steps, protest in his heart which his lips seemed unable to utter.

When Pere Chevillon was out of sight, Chico slowly turned puzzled eyes on Boul and the Rat who stood spell-bound, watching the incredible events taking place under their very noses. Chico, the recipient of blessed and holy medals. Chico, that rare indivdual, the man who has reached the goal of his ambition. Chico, the one-time sewer man now street washer!

Suddenly, his eyes falling on the card he held in his hand, Chico's pent-up emotion overflowed: "I'm a street washer!" he shouted wildly. "I have risen—I have risen—I have risen!" His heart was bursting—his words soared in jubilant song.

"Didn't the *bon Dieu* do that?" Boul's words

brought him down to earth again. He could not have been said to smile. He bared his teeth as he advanced toward his companions with fists doubled, in a gusty reversal of mood.

"Oh yes," he growled "*you* would say that!"

And yet, no denying it, the whole affair *was* strange. For, hardly more than a minute ago, Chico had been nothing at all—or that less-than-nothing, a mere scavenger. And now—behold! A man of position—a member of the Hose! Strange indeed! The very thing he had prayed for!

And still more curious revelations lay in wait for him. For, as he turned the religious medals over and over in his hand, examining them with curiosity, he made out that they were actually silver—of genuine value. Turning the box upside down, he noticed on the bottom thereof the price mark. Fifteen francs! Fifteen francs—the exact sum which the *bon Dieu* owed him, in very fact!

Chico stood scratching his head. Would wonders never cease? Queer, the look of things. As though somebody were turning the tables on him. And now, as if having a word of its own to add on the subject, the church bell, high in the air, rang forth one clear note, mystic in its meaning. Chico started. He looked over his shoulder nervously. But it

would not do to give way to superstition. Bah! He must rise above such weakness!

"It's all nonsense—a mere coincidence!" he replied to his own thoughts. "Of course there's nothing in it. Come, comrades, we'll go into the Mouth and have a drink in celebration of my rise in life!"

And so these three brave bold men and free now linked arms, and with gallant gestures swaggered like swashbuckling musketeers of old toward the wine-shop, roaring in unison a cheerful, and highly moral ditty:

> Drink a little bit, steal with care;
> Lie right out of it,—fight and dare;
> Love with your soul each day in seven;
> And you'll earn your turn in Heaven!

The good comrades had nearly reached the door of the Mouth when Boul's eye fell on Diane, still lying huddled on the ground, her head resting against the wine keg, since the Rat's removal of his pillowing knee. He broke away from his position as left wing of the advancing phalanx and stepped over to her side, calling out to the other two that it was not safe to leave her there. He had visions of Nana returning and slaying her unprotected prey

outright, while the backs of the self-appointed guardians were momentarily turned. He bent over Diane, and helped her to her feet with incoherent sounds of encouragement, inviting her to join them in a drink.

Diane obediently rose, and let herself be led toward the wine-shop door. On reaching it, she found the way barred. Not realizing that Chico constituted an intentional obstruction, and as it were, handing the care of Diane over to him, Boul passed on, care-free, into the Mouth, accompanied by the Rat.

Chico stood politely but immovably in the way of Diane's advance. "No—no—you understand, Mademoiselle, now that I am a street washer, I couldn't—"

No—of course—who could suppose that one raised to a station so exalted could afford to be seen consorting in a wine-shop with a wispy girl of the streets? As if to illustrate the reasonableness of this point of view, Maximilian Gobin sauntered out of the cafe at this moment.

Chico greeted him jovially, turning his back upon Diane.

Gobin, responsive as a turtle, cast not even a

glance in the sewer man's direction, but rolled with deliberation across the alley to his hose.

Chico followed him, undaunted, radiant. He burst forth with his news. How he had just been elevated to the hose! How he was no longer a sewer man! In proof, he proudly displayed Pere Chevillon's card.

Gobin gave only a questioning grunt in response, but unbent so far as to glance at the card, and having glanced, thawed as if his frozen surface had been exposed to the glow of a hearth fire. A most amiable smile over-spread his countenance, his fin-like paw shot forward, offered with unqualified cordiality. "Street washer!" he exclaimed, "Welcome, Comrade!"

"I thank you, Comrade!" returned Chico.

"Good evening, Comrade!" continued Gobin.

And "Good evening, Comrade!" concluded Chico. A manner of blood-brother ceremonial had been shared—a new loyalty established.

A William Fox Production. *Seventh Heaven.*

PÈRE CHEVILLON GIVES SOLACE TO THE DISCONSOLATE DIANE.

CHAPTER X

CHICO ASTOUNDS HIMSELF

Diane had accepted Chico's rebuff with submission. What was one more stab, when one had already received the death-thrust? She sank back again onto the edge of the gutter. The end of all things seemed to have come. During the time that she had lain quietly beside the Rat, while the three men had been eating, confused ideas had swarmed like dark bees in her head. She seemed to hear them buzzing, and their buzzing kept her from thinking clearly what she was to do now. One thought and one image stood out above the rest; the face of her Uncle Georges when he had cast her off. Not even Nana's violence and her own late struggle with death at her hands had seemed so painful as the sight of that once dear face, that was so stern toward all, so forbidding, but yet loving—even grudgingly tender toward herself. She saw it turning to cold dislike under her very eyes. Through all the hardships she had endured, through all the humiliation, the disgust, there had always

been one groping hope, one small glimmer of security in the background, wavering and uncertain though it was; she had not dared trust in it too substantially, but she had treasured the timid belief that if she could ever escape from Nana's domination, ever acquire the courage to make an effort after freedom, and find some means to return to the protection of her uncle's house, she might hope to make herself understood and believed by him. Could she not make him feel her to be not too guilty to be forgiven? Could she not convince him that she had been helpless in the clutch of circumstances when Nana had swept her away from the white farm house? She had been such a child, and Nana had always been able to make her do her will; she had been born unprovided with any weapons against Nana.

And now, by her own doing, she had lost all—her hope—his love—everything. Ought she to have lied, for Nana's sake—for her own—for his?

But no—she could not, in any case, have deceived him when it was himself (so different from her own poor father) who had implanted in her heart the love of honor, of truth and of honesty, the respect for uprightness, the hatred of shams and make-be-

lieves, of subterfuges and evasions among which her young childhood had been passed.

Life was too much for her. There was no way out. She could not remain with Nana. There was no place to go to. No one with any self-respect would have anything to do with her; this had come home to her with Chico's refusal to be seen in her company, even in that low wine-shop. She was too worn to make further effort. There was always the river—countless weary souls had found rest there. The way was clear—she wished drearily that the river were not so far away——

Her eyes had been closed, as she sat, elbows on knees, propping her head with her hands. She opened them now, and stared at the ground at her feet. She did not at first focus them upon anything, but presently her glance concentrated upon something glittering by the light of the street lamp. Her gaze sharpened as she recognized a thin-bladed clasp knife. Surely a Heaven-sent tool! So much nearer to hand than the river—so much swifter, too. She had heard that drowning did not hurt so very much, but it was a slow affair—one struggled in spite of oneself. But a knife—one swift, hard stab—and it was done. One had nothing more to do but die—nothing more could be expected of one.

Her hand slowly reached for the knife and picked it up. She examined it and slid a finger along the blade—yes, it was very sharp. Now then—

With startling suddenness her hand was jerked upward. She gripped the knife tightly. She looked up to find Chico by her side, eyes blazing and face flushed. He struggled for the knife; she held it, with incredible strength; but, after a sharp contest he succeeded in getting it out of her hand. He looked at Diane in amazement; he was breathing heavily and drops of sweat beaded his brow and neck. Diane, shaking with emotion, had collapsed again on the ground.

He stood staring at her. He could scarcely believe that this frail, frightened creature had intended so terrible a deed.

Suddenly she was on her feet, pale with resentment at this interference; this delay in doing what must be done. She snatched at the knife, pleaded with him to give it back.

"I like that!" said Chico, "My knife! What did you take my knife for?" he asked, turning an unconcerned back to her, while he closed and pocketed it.

"You can't prevent me! I'll go to the Seine!" she declared, her anger not dying down, her eyes still flashing.

He caught her mood and unexpectedly stormed back at her.

"Very well, then, go to the Seine! Jump off, then! Drown yourself, then! Lie in the Morgue with a rope around your hair, then! What the devil do I care? Women like you sicken me! I spit you out!" With this last amenity he stalked away toward the wine-shop. He had reached it; his hand was on the handle of the door, when he turned, unaccountably to himself, and glanced back at the girl. She stood motionless, looking after him, all the anguish of defeat, of loss, of fear—all the woe of the world gazing out of those grey eyes, and expressed in that one small, black figure.

And then Chico for the first time saw that she was beautiful.

Nothing so unseals the springs of pity as the sight of suffering beauty. Pity welled up in his heart. He scratched his head and went back to her side. To his amazement he found that he was shaking all over, and he felt a surprised interest in the phenomenon. "Where are you going?" he asked with alacrity as Diane turned away. She must be stopped if she were headed for the river. But she only dropped silently onto the keg at the foot of the lamp post. Chico stood beside her, leaning against

it. "You know," he said, "that is a terrible thing to do!"

"Leave me alone!" she muttered desolately.

He leaped away from her, retorting on the instant: "Snake of snakes! I'm not keeping you! There's the boulevard to the river! It's broad enough, I hope. You don't think it's my affair what you do! The devil take you!"

Again he went through the pantomime of leaving the creature to her own devices. He strode away, reached the Mouth's door, only to turn back to see what she was about—whether she had, indeed, started toward the river to destroy herself. She still sat dejectedly doubled over. A touching sight.

When next he spoke it was in an odd, new voice, in which was heard a mixture of sympathy and authority.

"Why did you want to take your life?"

Still motionless, with eyes fixed straight before her, Diane spoke as if to herself: "I can't go on—"

"You mean—you don't like what you are?" he questioned, surprised and puzzled.

"No—no!" Diane shivered.

He nodded, frowning, "Your sister, eh? She's cruel?"

"It's because I'm afraid!" she replied.

"But you have courage," he reasoned. "The idea of cutting oneself to death—that takes courage. I couldn't do it!"

Diane looked at him squarely. "Oh yes, you could," she said, "if you saw love die out of the eyes of the only one who really loved you—who really cared what you did—or what you were——!"

Chico whistled low and comprehendingly. "Oh, that was it! Your lover left you, eh?"

"No," with a sigh she shook her head. "My uncle."

"Oh, he found it out, then—your life, eh?" he continued.

"Yes, he cast us off!"

"Tch, tch, tch," he clucked feelingly. "Too bad!"

"He was right," she said wearily.

"Who can say?" Chico shrugged his broad shoulders with a world of tolerance.

The organ in the Church of the Heavenly Angels had for the last few moments been faintly audible, playing a soft, rambling, improvised melody; it made a fitting accompaniment to the subdued talk of the two young people under the street lamp. A new element had crept into their intercourse with Chico's softened mood—a note of clearer under-

standing, of greater gentleness. There is a heaven-born quality in church music uttered by a church organ under the hand of a musician, even if not a skilled master. The harmonious sound, descending soothingly upon their two spirits, seemed to bless them.

Upon Diane's expression of hopelessness, Chico urged, "But you say you don't like this life!"

"No—no." Again she shivered.

"Well, if you don't like it, you're not bad." The inference seemed conclusive.

Looking at him with puzzled eyes, she questioned after a pause: "Why?"

"I don't know," he confessed, returning her gaze, and noting more and more, as he looked, that she was a thing meant to gladden the eye and the heart, and not born for sin and suffering. "I don't know," he repeated absently, "but I *do know*. You see, when you say you don't like it, it makes all the difference. I am a sewer man myself, and that is as near nothing as a man can be—and yet, I am not nothing. I don't like it, and I don't belong there. You know," he said with his ingenuous smile, "I have noticed that I am a very remakable fellow! Why, sometimes, for no reason at all, I feel like a king!"

At this declaration the organ swelled in the noble, resounding chords of a prolonged Amen, and silence followed.

Chico seated himself beside the girl, on the upturned bucket left by Boul.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"Diane."

"That's a good name," he approved. "My name is Chico. Its more like a noise than a name. You see, I never had a real name, because I never had a father." He communicated the information as a humorous rather than a lamentable fact. He paused, studied her.

"You know, I'm growing sorry for you!" he observed, starting to his feet, as the echo of his words sounded in his own ears. "Now there I go!" he said with a discouraged sigh. "I shall have you on my hands, if I don't take care. But I can't help being your friend."

"My friend?" whispered Diane, rising.

"I know I shall regret it, but I can't help it," said Chico.

What more he might have told her remained unsaid, for at this moment a group of people passed along the lane at the head of the alley. Nana was among them. She stood with arms folded, proud

and silent, as the group stopped. It comprised several other women of her kind, whose pale and anxious faces were visible by the light of the street lantern; these were accompanied by two sergeants of police in uniform.

"The Police!" whispered Diane, and then—"Nana!" she cried, as her eyes fell upon the forbidding figure of her sister. She impulsively ran toward her, but the *gendarme* halted her and put sharp questions.

Diane replied that she was a seamstress and out of work.

He seized her by the arm. "Then you had better come with us."

"Wait!" cried Chico, interposing himself between Diane and the law. "Wait! Jacques, you can't arrest her—"

"Why not, Chico?" Jacques spoke as to an old friend.

"Because she is an honest woman—why should you arrest her?"

The *gendarme* who had released Diane's arm, now seized it again.

"Because she is the sister of that one, who is not an honest woman," he nodded toward Nana. "She

must prove her honesty at the court. Come, we are in haste."

"Wait!" repeated Chico, determined at all costs to avert this arrest, yet casting about in his mind in vain to find any pretext for preventing it.

"Since when are you giving orders to the police, Sewer Man?" laughed the *gendarme*.

"Sewer Man? Look!" cried Chico superbly, exhibiting the priest's card, as a Rajah might display the crown jewels of his ancestors.

"Street washer, eh?" said Jacques pleasantly.

"Yes—you must not arrest her."

"And why not? She is reported thief, vagrant —" began the *gendarme*.

"No—no——you can't arrest her." Chico was becoming feverish in the effort to find sufficient grounds to back up his words. "Because—because—"

"Well?" The law was resenting any delay but it's own.

"Because," blurted Chico with a muscular effort almost as great as if he had been hurling a thousand pound bomb, "because—she is my wife!"

"Why didn't you say so at once!" cried Jacques. "What a fuss about a matter so simple!" Then to the others he said, "Come, we have lost time!"

"He lies!" Nana declared with cold emphasis. "She is not his wife."

"What is that?" The law gathered its brows in an ominous frown. Jacques strode again toward Diane. "Where do you live?" he asked.

"Why—why—" Diane's tongue cleaved to the roof of her mouth.

"Forty-eight Rue Notre Dame de Lorette," Chico supplied adroitly.

"Tomorrow we will come to your house to see if you speak the truth." The law wished it known that it was not to be trifled with. "Get along, now," Jacques added, uniting his efforts with those of his companion in dragging away Nana, no longer silent and proud, but violently vociferous.

"You can't arrest me," she raved. "I am a friend of Brissac's—he will protect me. Don't you dare touch me!"

"Keep quiet, you!" shouted Jacques, as the group receded amid a clamor of contending voices.

The subsiding tide of sound found Chico sitting in his turn disconsolate on the keg, only a little less woebegone than its former occupant.

"Now why did I do that? Why did I say that? Oh! What have I done!" he lamented querulously.

Quietly, Diane made ready to remove herself

from his sight, and relieve him of his quandry in so far as it concerned her. "Don't worry," she said dispiritedly, "I am going away."

"But you can't!" In one bound Chico caught her. "They will look up the books, find no records, then they will come to my address and find I have no wife! Oh! Oh! I am ruined! I shall lose the hose—The Hose! *Mon Dieu,* what have I done!" Seated again on the keg and holding his head, he rocked as with physical pain. Being a Frenchman he was not afraid of drama. Being a Latin, he was not ashamed of tears—he wept! He even tore his hair—a little—

Diane crept up to him. "Perhaps," she said in a subdued voice, "you could let me stay with you until the police came, to prove to them that you had a wife. Then—" she added, her throat suddenly tied in a husky knot, "you could dismiss me—I would go away—and not trouble you!"

Chico looked up at her quickly, the tears still in his troubled eyes. "But how can we explain our marriage not being in the records?"

Diane had lately proved herself the niece of an upright and veracious uncle; she was, however, also the daughter of an imaginative and resourceful

father. "We can say," she suggested, "that we were—married—in Italy—or in Belgium."

Chico, unlike Monsieur Vulmir, was no Calvinist, no Puritan, no law abiding and God-fearing churchman. His face cleared at sight of the way of escape pointed out by Diane. "That's an idea, that!" he crowed, the clouds dispelled. "You have a great head!" He was appreciative of good heads.

"You have a great heart!" returned Diane, equally appreciative of good hearts. She took his hand, and carried it with a swift gesture to her lips. With a motion as rapid, he withdrew it, and wiped the back of it unchivalrously against his ribs. Then with as sudden repentance of his ungraciousness he cast about for some means of healing the hurt.

Boul, staggering slightly, appeared in the doorway of the Mouth. Singing thickly a line of a drinking song, he lurched toward his taxi. Chico's eyes fell upon him—here was the way!

"Hey, you!" he shouted. "Wind up Eloise!"

"What?" asked Boul, blinking.

"Wind up your sewing machine!" commanded Chico.

"Eh?" Boul was standing in front of Eloise; he now leaned against her radiator, to keep himself from falling.

"Start her up, Son of Night," ordered Chico. "Make her go!"

"Go!" sneered Boul, bending to crank, "Optimist!"

"BANG!" roared Eloise, her engine starting up with a deafening clatter. Eloise would have the world know that she realized what behavior was incumbent upon a lady on momentous occasions.

"My God, a miracle!" gasped Boul. "Chico, what do you mean?" he asked weakly.

"I mean," replied Chico crisply, "that you are to drive me home—me and my bride!" Chico could be very grand.

"Bride!" Boul would have burst, had bursting been a result which astonishment had power to bring about.

Chico was picking up and putting on his jacket, discarded on his first coming out of the sewer. As he did so he spoke to Diane in an undertone.

"Now remember, you must not take me seriously, you understand? I do this for a reason—you are not going to take advantage of me?" He looked both threatening and dejected.

"No—oh, no!" disclaimed Diane earnestly.

"Good!" Chico's relief was palpable.

With infinite grace he took Diane's hand.

"Allow me the honor of presenting you to Madame Chico, my good wife!" he apostrophized Boul.

Boul's mind was hazy concerning many things, as, for instance, how long he had lingered at the Mouth. Had he been asleep? Had he lived through several days of blankness? If not, how had there been time for such notable developments since he had entered the Inn for his drink—his drinks—his several drinks—his multiple drinks—his countless. . . . But of one thing he was certain—Eloise was awake, clamoring and shouting for instant action; not a moment must be lost; he precipitated himself to the driver's seat yelling, "Hurry up, before she stops—"

Diane, with starry eyes, saw herself led toward the taxi like a queen; she held her head high; like a queen being led forth to dance a minuet she trod with measured step to Eloise and ascended.

"Now," said Chico, and his words swelled and made music in Diane's ears, like that of the organ she had lately heard playing thrilling and heart-uplifting strains, "Now, make the Grand Wedding Tour! First, the place de la Concorde—then the Champs Eylsees—then drive by the Arc de Triomphe to the Bois—and then home—to No. 48

A William Fox Production. *Seventh Heaven.*

"THREE TIMES I HAVE ASKED AND NOTHING HAS HAPPENED—"

Rue Notre Dame de Lorette. And perdition take the expense, for tonight—I am the Bank of France!"

He jumped into the taxi after Diane. Both stood for a moment erect and proud, with eyes alight and mouths curved in gracious smiles, like sovereigns about to drive away under triumphal arches, amid the cheers of an admiring populace.

As Eloise started off with an upheaving jerk, Diane and Chico were bowled backward like nine pins onto the seat. Taking fresh breath, she again, with an intrepid initial leap and a violent detonation, slowly and shakily departed along the lane.

When it was out of sight, having rounded the corner of the Boulevard, the Hole in the Sock relapsed into sullen silence, eerie emptiness, dusky dimness, and sordid stench.

CHAPTER XI

THE GRAND TOUR

It is safe to say that never in Eloise's long history had she made such a tour. Many a time she had no doubt covered the same ground. She had carried gay Parisians, earnest English, strenuous Americans from the Place de la Concorde to the Bois de Boulogne. Never before had she gone on a tour like this.

There couldn't be such another tour—Diane was sure of that. It wasn't an ordinary drive—it was Paradise. Paradise sent right down here to earth, for her to revel and rejoice in for a few dazzling hours. Hers to hold, to finger, to fold against her heart of memories—and then to let go.

Yes—she knew it only too well. Nor for a moment did she forget the fact that this was all a wonderful dream. She was only a play bride, not a real one. This splendid hero who sat beside her was not a fairy prince come to claim her and lead her to happiness. He was merely a loaned fairy prince, one whom the fates had sent for a brief hour.

But years of bitter experience had taught Diane a certain philosophy. Although her subconsciousness never forgot the hard fact, that this was all a pretence and would, in a short time, come to an end, nevertheless she let herself give way to the delight while it lasted. So for the moment she was indeed the bride of the handsomest, noblest fairy prince that ever drew breath, and they were sitting side by side within a fairy chariot and were making a tour of the heavens.

Chico turned and looked at her.

"Mon Dieu! But you look better! You are bright as a button now! Who would think you were the sick girl lying there in the street awhile ago!" He did not add what he was secretly thinking, that she was extremely pretty now that her eyes and her cheeks glowed so warmly.

"Bang!" Eloise suddenly remarked. There was an ominous jolt; but apparently Boul's violent shout of "Get-up!" brought her to terms, for once more spell from very infection. For the first time in all she aimbled peacefully along.

Oh! The power of magic! Seen under its spell, what marvellous glamour surrounds even the most familiar objects! Boul himself, the rotund, the worldly-wise, on the driver's seat, came under the

his experienced old life he actually observed the fountain in the Place de la Concorde.

"She's a handsome female, isn't she?" he observed with enthusiasm, turning to point out the Nereid to his fares as if they had been strangers from America.

"Let's get out and sit for awhile on one of those benches," whispered Diane, "and just watch people. People—kind people, sober people, gay people—as they pass."

"I like to watch people, too!" cried Chico heartily. There was remarkable similarity of tastes between the two of them, he thought—but did not say. Very careful he must be, not to show too much warmth—this girl might begin to take him seriously.

And so, near the broad avenue lined with green trees which led all the way to the stately Arc, they sat and watched the bright evening crowd. Eloise was thankful to rest her rheumatic joints, and Boul stretched his legs. As for Diane, she talked scarcely at all.

"You don't say anything. Don't you like it?" Chico once inquired with a sudden access of anxiety. Of course he was indifferent to this girl—but still—he wanted to see the little thing have a good time for once.

She turned upon him eyes like stars. "It's glorious," she breathed in rapture.

Later they all went to a *café chantant*. It may have taken Chico's last franc, but, he was, for that evening, the Bank of France!

"Oh!" murmured Diane as the blaze of lights burst upon her. "We aren't going to have supper *here?*"

"And why not?" grandly responded her host. "If a man can't have a *café chantant* party on his wedding tour, I'd like to know when!" Then, in sudden panic, he bent to her and whispered: "You're sure you're not taking me seriously?"

"Oh, no indeed!" she assured him, and, in the blue velvet shadows made by the electric lights he did not see the wistful look that passed over her face. No need to remind Diane that paradise could not last!

Through the shadowy green of the trees streamed the gay lights. The shrill voices of the singers pierced the dusk. Red lights and yellow, blue and purple and green, dazzled Diane's eyes. The music, the lights, the gay throng chattering all at once were intoxicating.

A waiter stepped forward, led the way to a little table for three. Chico, Diane, Boul—what an

event, indeed! Would any member of the social group in the Hole have believed its eyes?

And the supper! The most marvellous little paté, and pastries, and wine! And all the time the music going on, and grand ladies wearing such brilliant gowns and showing such dazzling white shoulders!

"Boul, Boul—pinch me, and make me wake up!" Diane cried.

"Now do you think I'd do that? If you're dreaming, my dear, I'm glad of it!" responded the loyal *cocher*.

Chico was gazing with a troubled stare at the dainty chocolate pastry upon his plate. A fork had been placed beside it—now, what for? After reflecting, he took the entire pastry into his capacious hand and attacked it as he had attacked a hunk of bread at the sidewalk feast.

Diane daintily took up her fork and began hers with a relish in her own elegance. Chico, embarrassed, attempted self defense.

"Forks are for women," he observed. "They're weak and foolish. Now a man has no use for such silly trifles."

"A man who is to wield the hose should spurn so small a thing as a fork!" she cried gaily. "What

a droll voice that fat man has!" cried Chico as a new singer came forward. "He looks much like you, Boul!" he added mischievously.

They all laughed at the fat man and the resemblance, and the wine warmed them, and they burst into chatter faster than that of any other group. What a supper it was!

They were in rollicking mood by the time they left the café. Even Eloise seemed to partake of the mood; she made strange gurgling noises like a cracked and choking laugh, and she started forth at top speed. A whirl along the Champs Elysees—a vision of the superb Arc de Triomphe—toward the Bois de Boulogne—then—

"Let's go over to the Fête à Montmartre!" proposed Chico in a burst of recklessness. "We can wind up the evening there!"

They rode on pigs, they listened to music like a coffee grinder, they shot clay rabbits. Diane laughed and chattered, Chico laughed and chattered. Boul chortled deep in his portliness and waddled after them.

"The merry-go-round!" cried Chico. He put her up, he mounted himself, on two dashing chargers they whirled to the tune of the coffee grinder music.

"Oh! I'm going to fall off!" she screamed, doubled with laughter.

"I'll hold you!" He reached forward and caught her about the waist. Shouting with laughter they clung, while the chargers of the tossing manes and the flaming eyes seemed verily to enter into the sport. Even a wooden horse must now and then feel a thrill.

The music and the whirling slackened—died away. Chico's arm fell from her—almost reluctantly, it seemed. For an instant something very like a tear—a wistful tear—stole to her eye. But again she was gay.

"I'm dizzy but I'm happy!" she cried merrily. "I think it's the best part of the fun, feeling dizzy! It's like the wine—it creeps all over one,—makes one forget. . . ."

"What next?" demanded Chico, looking about. "I know!" he declared, as his eye lighted upon one of the ubiquitous photographers who abound at fêtes. "We'll have our portraits taken together!"

"Together?" murmured Diane.

Side by side stood Chico and Diane, the photographer snapped his fingers in the air for them to look at the spot where he snapped, told Chico to smile more pleasantly, and it was over. A finished

picture was handed to them—Diane kept it in her hand and stole peeps at it for the rest of the evening. But it was not herself that she was looking at in that poor little picture.

"I suppose it's got to come to an end!" Chico sighed. "We've done it all. Very well, then—home!" he roared superbly to his chauffeur.

But Eloise had risen to the situation in a manner far beyond her real strength. She had made the Grand Tour, and had made it with a flourish. Now she was spent. It had been too much to demand of her decrepit condition.

She struggled, wheezing and agonized, as far as Place Clichy. "Get-up!" Boul continued to bellow. She halted; he dismounted, administered a kick in the ribs, another kick. But all that poor Eloise could do was to groan pitifully, to struggle, gasp, pant, moan, and lie down.

Not another inch could she go.

"And why not walk, then!" cried Chico. Nothing was to spoil his gayety. He had had the Tour, that delight of his long dreams; and now, if he had to walk home, that was to be part of the merriment, too.

So, with blithe goodnights to Boul and good-luck

wishes, he and Diane set out, leaving their unfortunate *cocher* to kick and pant and tussle with Eloise.

"The stars are bright and the air is warm!" cried Diane, and she ran, gayly, swiftly, with Chico running to catch up. They were like children playing, romping—like children that have never known care. Never had they been so young, it seemed, in either of their crushed lives. And at last, "Here's my palatial abode!" cried Chico proudly, and, with a magnificent gesture of host-like welcome, he pointed to a flight of stairs.

Another—another—yet another—and on. Six flights, one upon another, led to this seventh floor attic which was Chico's.

At the top he fumbled for a match, went ahead, and lighted a candle.

"Enter, mademoiselle," he said.

Diane looked around in the dim and flickering light. It was a clean though disorderly little attic, full of all sorts of objects—clothes, humble pieces of furniture, pictures, a miscellaneous collection— From the candle, Chico was finding his way to the lamp—its light shone out. It shot up into Chico's glowing face, the inner and the outer glow meeting there. It shot forth upon Diane's red gold hair, into her eyes, her eyes like stars.

They looked at each other. A queer silence fell. But a moment before they had been chattering like children out of school as they panted their way up the long stair-flights. Now they were suddenly still, as if the enchantment of the evening had fallen away. Each was groping dimly toward the fact that life's problems had to be faced once more.

"I think—you can be comfortable here," said Chico. He was awkward, his voice went husky. "It's plain enough, heaven knows, but there's what you need. You'll find coffee for breakfast, and I'll bring the bread with me when I come. I'll have to get here early. My work won't wait."

Diane gazed at him silently.

"Anything I can do for you before I go?" he asked, striving to play the host with *éclat*.

"Oh, no—thank you, nothing at all," she murmured. "And the coffee will be ready when you come," she added.

Again they looked at each other. "You've had a good time?" he asked.

"Like paradise."

He nodded approvingly.

"Goodnight," he said gruffly, and was gone.

Left to herself there in the little attic she sank into a chair and sat dreaming—long, long, with

eyes wide open, staring into space, the enchantment came back. It crept softly about her, enfolded her. Yes, she still had her paradise—still the dream held.

And now before her rose the picture of Chico. Gay, gallant, rough, gruff, tender, harsh, gentle, stubborn—all that queer bundle of inconsistencies that went to make him up.

Chico! A tenderness crept into Diane's eyes at the name, her lips parted in a faint smile. Chico!

Her hand, outstretched on the table, touched cloth. She glanced down. Chico's coat. She felt it softly. This was his room, his home!

Suddenly she jumped to her feet and set out to make a tour of the attic, like a cat in an enchanted garret. The stove, the table, the chairs, the bed, the little washstand in one corner and cupboard in another, the empty bird cage, the shelves with dishes, the colored prints upon the walls.

Everything possessed a strange charm. Poor little humble possessions—what were they? What was their spell?

Stumbling with sleepiness, and yet with eyes still starry, Diane at length tumbled into the narrow iron bed. The wand still paused above her; the spell was unbroken. In her dreams Chico rode upon a pig—but Chico had wings.

CHAPTER XII

HEAVEN

Diane woke and groped her way toward full consciousness. Where was she? Where could all that brightness come from? She was used to a dark room, heavy with foul air—what could be the meaning of all this sunshine and breeze, this sense of buoyancy in every breath? Ah! She remembered —remembered everything. With a happy smile she looked around.

Yes, she was in Chico's attic. The dazzling summer sun poured in through the wide skylight of this seventh floor apartment at No. 48 Rue Notre Dame de Lorette. Under it a series of three latticed windows set in the mansard roof afforded a view of the white domes of the Sacré Coeur of Montmartre rising pearly toward the distant clouds. Through both skylight and lattice a vast expanse of sky was visible above the nearby chimneypots. Drawn up under the right-hand window an overturned wooden box formed a step to the low sill, beyond which extended a narrow ledge of leaded roof which stretched away toward the right but stopped short at the left, the

left-hand windows looking sheerly down to the ground below.

In this eyrie Chico had for some years past been perching. Here he had lived and dreamed and pondered those weighty questions which made of him an "atheist," and such "a very remarkable fellow." Here he had inhaled the sweet night-breezes of spring, the languid airs of summer, the tonic breath of autumn, the keen winds of winter, as the seasons wove their way into his past. Out of that window he stepped onto the ledge to feed the pigeons and pass the time of day with other chimneypot dwellers. Here he kept his house hold goods—his stove, his frying pan, his marmite, his cage, now empty, which had once housed a blackbird very dear to him. He had shed tears over the blackbird's demise. Here were his colored print of General Marchand, of Fashoda fame; his table, his two chairs, his shelves with the few dishes, his chest of drawers with the scarred mirror above it, his narrow iron bed. It was all simple enough, poor enough, but it was up high above the dust and the smell of the streets, up as near to the clouds and the stars as he could reach. Such is the natural reaction of those who spend their days in sewers. The attic was lonely, perhaps, but by no means cheerless. Given

air, given the sun at dawn, the moon by night, and the great sight of heaven, what place would not seem grateful to the man of the drain-pipes? Given a dwelling swept by the four winds of heaven, (and they swept in right properly through the loose-jointed skylight) what man of the netherworld would not joyously fill his lungs with their sweet breath?

Diane gave a long luxurious stretch, then she jumped up. Chico would be here soon to have his coffee. She must not let him catch her napping! Ah! What fun it would be to make everything spick and span and ready, and to have him walk in upon a table in readiness!

She flew to set the attic to rights. Here she snatched a garment and hung it neatly upon a hook; there she whisked away some crumpled newspaper left lying about. She found a duster and flapped it vigorously; she started the fire and set the coffee pot upon it. A touch here, a touch there—by the magic of woman's hand, that magic of the ages, the room was transformed.

Steps on the stairs. A gruff "Ahem!" Then a knock.

"Come in!" cried Diane. And, as Chico entered, "All ready!" She was glowing.

He looked about. For the life of him he couldn't have told what had been done. There was his room, just as he had left it—his possessions were undisturbed. And yet something had crept into it —some spirit that had transmuted all things.

He stared. For long moments he held silence, gazing, marvelling. Then a broad, delighted smile crept into his eyes—spread to his mouth—covered his whole face. He looked at Diane—he beamed upon her, in such a radiance of pleasure, gratitude, astonished happiness as vied with the very sun itself.

Suddenly he caught himself at it. This would never do. He mustered a scowl like a thunder cloud.

"Here's the loaf," said Chico gruffly, and thrust it at her.

That distinguished personage, Maximilian Gobin, the wielder of the hose, lived in a nearby attic behind the flourishing window-garden of his spouse. Here Madame Gobin watered her rose geranium and lemon verbena; here she made soup and coffee and stew for her lord and master; and here she now awaited the day when she should present him with an heir.

On that morning of marvel, after Chico had

eaten his breakfast and departed, Diane wandered forth upon the roof, sniffed the sweetness of the rose geranium, and paused to admire the window-box.

"Do pick a sprig if you like it!" sounded a cheery voice from within, and forthwith a cheery face exactly matching the voice, shone forth above the garden, inside the attic room.

"How I should like to wear a sprig!" cried Diane in delight. "Oh, it smells like the old garden—that garden of the white farmhouse—at home!" There was a tear twinkling through her smile.

Something in the girl's face touched the good-hearted Madame Gobin. She invited her in; and from that hour there grew a friendship between the two, one that was to abide.

"You don't suppose, do you, that there's any truth in these rumors of war?" inquired the wife of Gobin. "I keep asking Maximilian, but he merely 'Hmphs!' I think he is afraid to tell me the truth, at such a time. If only he would understand! I am made more anxious by these dark suspicions than if he told me frankly, and that is bad for my condition."

"Of course!" said Diane sympathetically. "But you need not worry. It's all just silly talk."

Madame Gobin was delighted to welcome a

woman neighbor, and Diane's cup of happiness overflowed when she found that she could be of assistance to her. The older woman was approaching the hour when she would be unable to attend to her household cares; Diane proposed to help her.

"How kind of you! But I cannot let you work for me!"

"If you only knew—it will be a pleasure. At home—I was quite a famous cook—you should try my onion soup! I will send you some when it is ready."

Still another joy! For service was Diane's happiness—service to those whom she could love and who would love her in return. What days lay ahead of her! Days in which she could breathe the pure air of heaven and glow in its sunshine; could be a neighbor to this kind woman; could set forth three meals a day for Chico, and keep his house in order, and pause in the lapses of work to dream—dream—

Diane caught her breath. Ah, that was the pain of it all—it was only a dream.

On the third day after the Grand Tour, Chico's climax of joy was capped by his receiving the hose. To him it was a ceremonial. As his friends in the Hole observed, you might have thought that he had

himself invented the hose and the method of washing the streets with it. Such a chest never swelled before—its expansion bade fair to reach to the point of bursting. He strutted, he puffed, he reared his head and stalked like a cock-o'-the-walk.

"And now," said Chico, "this is what I will do if war comes." Whereupon he raised his hose as if it had been a gun, and began shooting water like cannon balls.

"Beware, Rat!" he cried. "I am about to treat you as if you were a German general!"

The Rat emitted a terrific squeal and leaped like a frightened animal to cover—but too late. Chico's aim was magnificent—as magnificent as his imagination. The Rat was drenched, and only a miracle saved him from drowning.

"Behold!" said Chico with a puff and a strut. "Thus I shall meet the foe—if we come to war!"

The days were slipping by like glittering beads to Diane. Her warm friendship with Madame Gobin, which took outward and tangible form in the exchange of onion soup for fragrant bouquets, was a new interest in life. Gobin himself was very neighborly, now that he had accepted Chico as a comrade, and the four were becoming bound in fast friend-

ship. Gobin was in a state of tremendous excitement over his proud fatherhood-to-be, and would not for a moment admit the possibility of anything but a boy, although, as the saucy Arlette observed, "who knows but it might be two girls?"

Arlette—yes, indeed, she was not to be out of all this! She had followed to the seventh floor attic, and had made her way to Diane to know all about it. Nothing could quell the curiosity of Arlette—and a loving curiousity it was, after all. She must hear every detail of the Grand Tour, she must make the acquaintance of this new neighbor of Diane's. She was soon impressed into service by the commanding Gobin, to do errands for his wife.

"She must be cared for very tenderly now," he said. "At any hour my son may arrive. I am grateful to you, Madame Chico, for the good soup. And my wife must hear no talk of war at such a time."

But nevertheless the talk of war was in the air, and it rose even to Madame Gobin's attic, it breathed itself in through her window, it hovered above her bed. There was no escaping it. For this was the year of 1914 and the month was August.

On this morning when Chico was receiving the

hose, and, according to his belief, making history, Arlette was high in his own attic with Diane. The scent that filled the room was not that of Madame Gobin's lemon verbena and rose geranium. The air was, in fact, heavy with the reek of onion soup, a capacious kettleful of which was simmering on the stove. Over it, eyes intent and nose alert, bent Diane, fanning the steam with the kettle cover, with the double purpose of discovering by sight whether the bubbles indicated that the cooking process was proceeding too slowly or too fast, and by smell whether the mixture were in danger of scorching or, again, whether another dash of pepper were advisable. Yet another kettle, hardby, contained some other savory-scented mess, to which Diane lent intermittent attention, tasting it, from time to time, and making that dainty, rapid smacking motion of the lips, which seems to aid the high priestess of the kitchen altar to determine questions in the *nuances* of flavor.

Diane looked very much at home, very busy, very much the born household genius functioning in her proper sphere, as she bent over the stove, her golden curls smoothed and made shapely, burnished to a metallic lustre, confined by a broad black ribbon;

her rusty black dress brightened by a checked red and white apron improvised out of a dish towel.

On the table in the middle of the room, perching bird-like, nibbling a sprig of parsley (she, too, had been sampling the onion soup) Arlette was chattering like a magpie. She had been imparting the latest news of the Hole in the Sock, and was now extracting that of the top floor of No. 48 Rue Notre Dame de Lorette.

Arlette brought news of Nana. She was safely locked up, for the present at least, in St. Lazarre prison. Diane shuddered as she heard the name —she could not bear that such a fate should befall even this sister who had grown to be her nightmare —but some childhood memory of affection still clung, perhaps. The practical Arlette, however, could not see why Diane should not rejoice, and, in fact, she informed Diane that Chico had said the same thing.

Diane said no more—her emotions were too complex for words. But, after all, she was unable to feel any grief while this wonderful dream lasted. She hummed as she worked, tying a napkin by its four corners around the plate destined for Madame Gobin.

"Now, Arlette! All ready for you to take it to

her! Careful! Don't spill a drop." And again Diane fell to humming.

Arlette returned to chatter for awhile, then set off. Her father's wine-shop demanded her return. Diane found herself alone once more. The soup, making ready for Chico's supper, filled the room with its savoriness. She sniffed it—good soup! Chico would like it, she hoped!

In the quiet hour of waiting her thoughts travelled over many things. She thought of war—was there anything in the rumor? No, surely not—that was the notion of men, and men were absurd creatures.

She thought of Madame Gobin, there in her cheery attic, awaiting the doctor. He was expected by noon. Gobin had said, "Our son will arrive by evening." Gobin, it was who had told Diane there would be no war, because nations were today too civilized.

But such matters were far off to Diane. The near thing, the beloved thing was this attic. Of a sudden she had a name for it. Spreading her arms in an impulsive gesture that seemed to embrace the little room, she cried,

"It's the Seventh Heaven!"

* * *

She glanced around the room. It did look nice, she thought. She had made it so clean, and so orderly. She had not been idle in her solitude and her dreaming. She went to the row of pegs beside the door and took a jacket of his from one of them. Humming the little song she had heard him sing, she carried the jacket to the table.

"Drink a little bit, steal with Care—"—she smiled—"Lie right out of it—fight and dare—"

She smiled again. Such a funny, foolish song, rather wicked, if one took it seriously, which of course one didn't—

In an old cigar box she had some sewing things, fetched away for her by Arlette, and brought to her here from the Hole in the Sock. She mended a rent in the sleeve. She mended a rip in the pocket, a worn place in the lining—from time to time she laid her cheek against the prosaic garment—

"Love with your soul each day in seven—"

Her glance rested on Chico's pipe; she filled it and packed down the tobacco expertly; she took a delicate puff at it, to see that it drew perfectly—

"And you'll earn your turn in Heaven!"

"And you'll earn your turn in Heaven—"—she smiled. "Heaven!" She looked about her!

"Heaven!"

CHAPTER XIII

HEAVEN STILL

Arlette was not the only old friend who called upon Diane in her new residence. Papa Boul himself mounted the six flights to the Seventh Heaven. He found Diane alone, busy at her mending, singing happily; and the meeting was warm.

His knock had startled Diane, to tell the truth. Every knock meant to her the police. For she was anxiously awaiting that hour when the Law should make its threatened visit, to learn whether Chico had a wife; and as soon as the visit was over, her reason for being here would be over, too.

That was why Diane so dreaded the coming of the officers. But for that knowledge always lurking in the shadowy depths of her happiness, the knowledge that heaven could not last, she would have floated on perpetual clouds of bliss.

Finding who her visitor was, her smile glowed forth in a welcome to the old *cocher*.

"How glad I am to see you!" she cried.

Boul stood in the narrow landing at the head of

the stairs outside the door, a general air of festivity surrounding him like an aureole; his white enamel hat was far over one eye; his red waistcoat, buttoned by a single top button, spread wide open over a large inverted V-shaped acreage of front, covered with a none too clean shirt. The most striking feature of the picture he made was, however, a magnificent new gold chain with a dazzling jewelled watch charm dependent therefrom, which was draped across this bay of contentment.

He unceremoniously hugged Diane as he entered the room. How their tongues did wag! She seated him in the most comfortable chair—by no means as capacious as the occasion required—and chattered to him, exchanging news for news. It appeared that Chico had commanded the *cocher* to meet him at his attic at ten o'clock sharp, offering the special inducement of not having his head cut off, provided he was on time. With patent pride Boul consulted his new watch, a turnip in size and shape, while Diane went to the cupboard to fetch a glass and a bottle of cognac.

Boul smacked his lips. A pleasant way to be received, indeed! He looked about with admiration, commenting on the fine view of heaven from the skylight ("Heaven, indeed!" breathed Diane to

herself), on the miracle of Chico's receiving a wife in answer to his prayer—would he never learn to believe in the good God?—on the pungent whiffs which emanated from the stove. And then he brought forth startling news. Nana had been released from prison, thanks to the efforts of Brissac. Boul had seen her; she had sent a message to her sister that, if she did not return at once, Nana would come for her.

Diane was like one paralyzed. Her natural pallor gave way to a sickly gray. Boul made a start as if to catch her, thinking she was about to fall.

"But why should you be so afraid of her? Chico will protect you, poor child. A fine, brave fellow like that can surely protect his wife!"

Diane turned to him mournfully. "That's just it," she moaned. "I'm not Chico's wife. It's all a pretence."

And then did the round-mouthed Boul receive the astonishing tale—how there had been no marriage, it was all an arrangement to dupe the police. How she was to leave the attic as soon as the police should have been here and been satisfied at finding an apparent wife in Chico's home.

Boul swelled and reddened in his astonished indignation. He turned her around by the shoulders,

making her face him. "Hasn't he been living with you for three days?" he questioned like a solicitous parent, or uncle at the very least.

She shook her head. "No!"

"What!" he roared.

"He comes here for his food," she exclaimed, "but at night—I—I—am alone—"

"Alone!" Boul was aghast.

"At nights he sleeps at Monsieur Charlot's," she continued.

There was no reason for disbelieving her.

"I never heard of such a thing!" The unutterable contempt expressed by Boul would have been found surprising by certain persons of a different class, nation or race. "But what can you expect of an atheist!" he as amazingly reasoned. "This comes of not having a good Christian education! I'll speak to him!" Boul could not have been more seriously disturbed had he, as the outraged father of an outraged daughter, intended to challenge the trifler to a duel.

"Oh, don't—don't, please!" she begged. "The truth is, he doesn't love me." She had turned to the table.

"Oh, pouff!" he derided.

"Yes," she insisted. "He said he knew I'd be on

his hands—you know he says he always does the thing he doesn't want to do."

"That's true," Boul conceded, rubbing his chin reflectively, "that's Chico!"

"Monsieur Gobin," Diane picked up a different thread, to change the direction of the discussion, "thinks he can get me his wife's old place in the factory."

She was standing at the window now, her gaze wandering out over the roofs, toward the fragrant window-box. As she spoke of Gobin—thought of him, his wife, their cozy home, the little one so soon to be in their arms—Diane's eyes filled with a mist of wistful longing. It was the envy of a child looking into the toy-shop window at holiday time. To be married—loved—cherished—to have a baby—oh.

Boul saw the mist in her eyes, and, after a clumsy fashion of his own, he followed the aching path of her thoughts. He threw a paternal arm about her shoulders, urged her to cheer up; she and he together would burn a candle to St. Antoine, he told her, and that would make everything come right!

At that moment a brisk whistling was heard on

the stairs without. Diane knew who it was—no mistake this time! With a sudden radiance overspreading her gloom, she darted to the mirror, patted her hair, adjusted its ribbon, straightened her apron, slapped and pinched her pale cheeks to pink; she ran to the door, unlocked it, threw it open—to Chico.

He entered, still cheerfully whistling, carrying a large pasteboard box under one arm. He was a refreshing sight, in a clean new pair of wide pantaloons, and a clean new blue smock. The white rose stuck behind one ear looked more congruous than one would suppose possible. He had evidently just come from the barber's; his face was ruddy but dusted over with whiff of white rice powder. It was easy to believe that countless young women had at sight of him this morning said, either to themselves, or to their companions, male or female: "*En voila, un joli garcon! Regardez-moi donc ce gaillard là!*"

A personable lad, Chico, nor did he require to be informed of it.

Ignoring Diane as he passed into the room, his eyes fell upon the visitor. "Hello, Papa Boul!" he exclaimed delightedly, throwing the box onto

the table and grasping Boul by the hand.

"Papa Boul—bah! Are you a cow or a sheep that Papa Boul must show you what a jewel you have?"

"Hey—stop that!" said Chico, hitting at the hand he had just clasped so heartily.

"Wake up, you idiot!" growled Boul, doubling that hand into a fist, and shaking it in Chico's face.

"Leave me alone!" muttered Chico sulkily.

"Leave you alone?" ranted Boul.

"Yes," said Chico.

Boul very deliberately sat down and crossed his fat knees. "Very well. But what did you want with me and Eloise at ten oclock, if one may inquire."

To cover her embarrassment Diane had withdrawn to the stove and was now stirring the onion soup.

"I wanted you both for a very important event," said Chico with conscious virtue, "but I find now that you will not be needed until eleven."

He mechanically picked at the string fastening the pasteboard box, and succeeded in untying it.

"Nearly another hour," commented Boul, "what—"

"You see," interrupted Chico, "I didn't know I had to have a name. I had great difficulty in proving to those fools at the Bureau that I was born. Because I was not on the records, they said there was no such person as me; I said there must have been, for here I am—"

"What did you do?" asked Boul.

"Do? I made them believe I was alive before I was through with them," elucidated Chico. "It took everybody they had in the office, and it was not until I was thrown out for the third time that they were forced to admit that I was alive—and to get rid of me they gave me a paper which says that I am born."

He produced a paper from his pocket and tapped it contemptuously. "And at eleven," he tossed off the information negligently, "we are to be married."

Boul rose with alacrity from his chair. Diane flew, dripping spoon in hand, from the stove to Chico's side.

"Married!" she said. The word was hushed and honey-sweet.

Still casting no glance in her direction, but addressing himself exclusively to Boul, Chico continued, "So you will come back in time to get us

there at eleven. That is, if you think Eloise is well enough to stand such excitement?"

Boul did not answer him. He turned instead to Diane.

"Bravo!" he rejoiced. "What did I tell you, my kitten? There's good sense now. He's not such a fool as he looks!" He glanced at Chico, and met his eye with that deep mutual understanding which all men share, when a woman is to be cajoled. "Of course, Eloise and I will carry you to your happiness. And as a wedding gift for the bridegroom, please accept this genuine gold watch and chain!"

The fat gold watch, heavy chain, and brilliant pendant, were exhumed from the unobstructive hinder pocket and with a large gesture placed in Chico's hand.

"But, Boul," remonstrated Chico politely, "I couldn't think of accepting a present so valuable!"

"Keep it! Keep it! It cost me nothing," Boul let fall airily. With a twinkling eye and repressed smile he added, turning toward Diane, "and as for a present for Madame—I think I know where I can put my fingers on something very—very nice—" His compressed right hand thumb and finger, indeed, made a deft, delicately lifting motion which

promised much. He opened the door, about to take his leave.

"Stay and drink with us, Boul," invited Chico.

"No—no!" Boul was now standing in the open doorway. "I must shave, put on a clean shirt, and light a candle to St. Antoine for health, happiness and a large family to Monsieur and Madame Chico!"

Flourishing one hand, he with the other closed the door upon his retreat.

"Au revoir, friend Boul!" Chico called after him. "A good friend, eh?" he added to Diane, after his laughter had subsided and silence had fallen upon the room. The silence continuing, he turned to where Diane stood with bowed head.

They were alone. Her embarrassment communicated itself to him.

CHAPTER XIV

THE WEDDING GOWN

It was more embarrassing now that she knew what he purposed. He searched for words to break the stillness of the room which weighed vaguely upon his spirits.

"You don't say anything," he managed finally.

Still without speaking she came to his side and stood looking up at him. Unable to stand the wordless appeal in her eyes, he edged away toward the table. With sudden inspiration he lifted the lid from the box; removing the layer of fresh white tissue paper, he rubbed his hands lightly together in a motion expressive both of uncertainty and pleasure.

"Look! Your wedding clothes!"

As if to add the last touch of grace to the gift, he took the rose from behind his ear. "Here!" he said, tossing it onto the snowy finery lying in the box.

Diane's knees bent under her—she dropped, kneeling at his feet.

"No—no," he cried, quickly preventing her, "you mustn't do such things!"

"You give me everything—I have nothing to give you—nothing!" she lamented humbly.

"Don't say that," he murmured; her humility was discomforting.

"Do you really want to marry me?" The question was difficult.

Chico shrugged. "Ye-es," he replied, none too graciously.

"Why?" she asked.

"I don't know," he admitted.

"You don't have to." Her voice was very low, but heavy with feeling.

Chico sat on the corner of the table and swung an independent leg. "I know that," he allowed, quietly.

"You are so strange—unlike anyone—" she wondered.

"That's true," he agreed, with eminent satisfaction. "There's nobody like me. I'm a very remarkable fellow!" He laughed to himself.

"Oh, yes," she corroborated eagerly, "But I don't understand. You say you will marry me—but you—don't—" her words faded on her lips.

"Well?" he questioned.

"Won't you say something?" she pleaded softly.

"Say something? What?" he asked, rising.

"Just one word—" (how hard she found it to say)— "one word—of—love—to tell me that you are not marrying me out of pity alone!"

He frowned—there it was! The same old story —this doing of things one didn't want to—not yet—

"You mean you want me to make love to you?"

She looked down, a faint glow rising to her forehead. He laughed sheepishly at the sight. She made him think of a wild rose at the moment, and usually she was like a camelia—no, like a gardenia —for he granted that she was very sweet. He rubbed the back of his curly poll and gathered himself for the effort of humoring her by turning this thought into a pretty speech. He merely succeeded in looking foolish.

"I should feel like an idiot to talk like that!" he said petulantly, walking away from her to the cupboard at the extreme end of the room. He turned, saw her blush become a painful crimson of discomfiture, and added reluctantly: "I'll do it just this once—no more! Come here!" he beckoned peremptorily.

She crossed the room to him.

"You—you—you are—errr." He hesitated.

How proceed? Were he to tell her what he was thinking at that moment it would sound like poetry —absurd!

He burst into an embarrassed laugh, then sobering, for the eyes she turned to him were very serious, indeed sad, he went on—"I—you—you and I did not exist until we met. Now we are one destiny."

There—so far so good—and not too sickeningly sentimental.

"Are we?" she questioned, the sadness giving place to wonder, but the seriousness remaining.

He paused. "Yes," he said finally; then gently, "You see, it is nothing but arithmetic."

"Arithmetic?" she echoed.

"Of course. You see, you and I are one—so one and one make one. You understand?"

"No—no!" Diane stammered, puzzled, then she withdrew to the table and sank into the chair; tears choked her—she did not, in fact, clearly know, but an intimation of what he meant, which she dared not let herself believe, broke over her in a thrilling wave. The dear kindness of his voice and eyes were beyond question, and her hands went up to her own eyes to check the happy drops brimming there.

"*Mon Dieu!*" he cried in mock dismay. "You

asked me to make love to you—and now look at you!"

She made a sound between laugh and sob, as she dried her eyes hastily.

"Well, this way then," he proceeded. He placed a finger first on his own heart—and then on hers—as an accompaniment to his words—"Chico—Diane—" he then looked about him, and spreading open his hands at the little room, added, "Heaven!"

At the word, echo of that which rang in the very core of her heart, Diane's head swam. She closed her eyes, clinging to the sound of it, loth to let it fade.

"Say it again," she murmured.

Pleased with his find (that was a pretty conceit, he quite fancied it!) he repeated accommodatingly:

"Chico—Diane—Heaven!"

A pause,—in which she scarcely dared breathe, so did she fear to scatter the vision forever—then "Say it again!" she entreated from fathom-deep in her bath of bliss.

She was jerked out of it rudely.

"Hey, stop it!" shouted Chico.

The siren with the closed eyes and rapture-submerged face, would keep him saying things—saying them before he was ready. ("Gently, gently, young

lady," he thought. "He who goes slowly, goes safely—and likewise far.")

He poured himself out a stiff drink of cognac from the bottle left on the table since Boul's departure.

Hands on her heart, Diane spoke more than half to herself:

"Yes, it's the truth—this is Heaven! And if there is a *Bon Dieu* in Heaven—you are he!"

He stared into the depths of his glass. "Perhaps you are right," he said, tossing off his drink. He smiled complacently, "I know I am a very remarkable fellow!" He set the glass noisily back upon the table.

"Oh, yes," fanatical fervor lighted her eyes as she agreed.

"You've noticed that, too, have you?" he asked amiably.

"Oh, yes!"

"It's wonderful the things I feel," he responded. "The thoughts I think!—I—I—why, sometimes I could reach out and touch a star! And—" Chico very abruptly tumbled from his sublime heights; his nose sharpened—it sniffed; "What's that smell?" he asked, going toward the stove and lifting the lid from the kettle. "Onion soup!" he marveled; then

squaring upon her suspiciously he pointed at her an accusing wooden spoon, which he unhooked from the wall. "Some more of your good cooking! You are trying to bewitch me that way, eh? Listen, if you think it necessary to reach Chico's heart through his stomach, I can tell you—" He sniffed again with sensuous delight, as he leaned to the kettle. "Let's have some of it now—" he ended irrelevantly.

She quickly fetched a bowl, filled it, and set it on the table, placing his chair cozily before it.

"Well," he remarked, as he absorbed the soup with gusto, "since I've got to live the rest of my days with you, it's a comfort to know you're a good cook."

He spoke between relishful gulps. "And another thing, young lady," he added setting down bowl and soup, when the last sup had been drained, and his lips well smacked, "you are not marrying a poor man. See that? A month in advance." He produced a handful of bills and coins from his pocket, and laid them on the table before her. "We shall have a picnic this afternoon, after the wedding, in the Bois, that will live in history! I have invited all the Hose and the whole Sewer!"

A proud day in the life history of Chico!

Smiling, she had taken his jacket from the back of the chair where she had hung it on Boul's arrival. She now resumed her mending of it.

"Madame Chico!" she mused happily. I'm going to be *something* at last!"

"To be my wife *is* something!" he asserted.

Diane said nothing and looked everything.

She finished the fastening of the last of the dangling buttons. "There, I've finished your jacket," she said, holding it up for his inspection.

He took it from her; their hands met for a moment, and they were tender hands. He examined the jacket curiously. When he spoke it was with a joyous surprise: "Why, you've mended it all over!" He looked at her, a warm wave pervading his being.

She took his jacket without comment, and again fitted the shoulders of it neatly over the back of the chair. Her head tilted on one side, she gave the collar a little deft roll, and patted it into shape with lingering touches, now and again glancing at him with a faint dimpling of one corner of her mouth. His eyes did not leave her. The soup on the stove made a burbling sound which called to her. She ran to place it in a cooler corner. He inspected her steadily, picked up his pipe, was about to fill

it—ah, it was already filled—it drew—just right! He lighted it, quietly regarding the girl.

"I am content," he sighed, with a deep sense of luxury.

"Are you?" Her voice quivered.

Chico nodded; he smiled; nodded again, then laughed outright.

"Who would have thought," he exclaimed gleefully, "three days ago, when I was in the sewer, that I would have the hose, a yellow-haired wife, and money enough to pay for taxicabs for all our wedding guests? Boul says it is because I lighted those three candles to the *Bon Dieu!* As if fifteen francs' worth of candles—" his derisive chuckle cut off the words.

"It must have been some sort of *Bon Dieu* that brought you to me," she suggested.

"Pooh!" he cried, "don't bother your head about such big thoughts. Leave them to me!"

"I will!" she complied submissively. She had collected his socks from the chest of drawers, and was now darning such among them as held out the vaguest hope of rewarding her labor. Sitting across the table from him, she made the picture of domestic femininity that every honest man loves to behold within his own four walls.

"It's all simple enough," continued Chico, pulling at his pipe, "it's what you put inside of you, the *Idea*, that makes you what you are."

"The idea?" she repeated, to invite amplification.

"Yes, that is my religion. Put fear and trouble inside of you, and it is just as if you put garlic and vanilla *parfait* into your stomach. The result is the same—bellyache!" He rose and strutted about the room. "Look at Maximilian Gobin!" he harangued. "It is easy to see the Idea he has put inside of him!" He laid his pipe on the table, and imitating Gobin's walk, stroked and curled an imaginary pair of mustachios. "Maximilian Gobin—you are only you—while *I* am Maximilian Gobin! No one can hide his Idea," he added, relapsing into his own voice and manner. "Yours is fear. The very name of Nana frightens you."

Seeing Diane shudder, he came to her side, and getting down on his haunches, leaned toward her, looking into her face.

"That must not be," he said urgently. "You must put the Idea 'Courage' inside of you!"

"Inside of me?" she smiled. "You think you can eat courage with a spoon?"

"Child, it is so simple that everyone laughs and calls it foolish! Listen to me!" he discoursed,

"You get the Idea you want—like the word 'Courage' "—he shut his eyes, as if to concentrate his thoughts upon the word, which he emphasized by beating his forehead with his closed fist, "and then like a bulldog you hang on, and never, *never* let go! Oh, it isn't easy," he added, opening his eyes again, rising, and walking about the room. "You will get bumps and blows, but hang onto 'Courage' and bye-and-bye you will astonish yourself! You will *be* that word—you will be courageous! That is why I am a remarkable fellow and astonish myself with what I am—because I know I can *make* what I am. That is why I am an atheist. That is why I know there is no *Bon Dieu.*"

With the last words he had come back to the table and dropped into his chair again. He leaned heavily against the back on which his jacket was hanging. He suddenly winced and jumped up with an exclamation of pain.

"What the devil—" he cried. Something in one of the coat pockets had hurt him. He took up his jacket and out of its right pocket produced the little box of the twin medals.

"Snake of snakes!" The ejaculation sprang automatically to his lips.

"What is the matter?" asked Diane with bated breath.

He frowned as he opened the little box. "The priest's medals—that's queer!" he said.

"What does it mean?" she queried.

"Nothing," he replied, squaring his shoulders. "Always these coincidences to frighten me. But I won't be fooled!" He dropped the box and medals on the table. "I am myself—Chico—I march alone!" Stoutly he pronounced these articles of his belief.

Gobin's silhouette darkened the window, as he appeared on the roof. He entered, his face pale, and although he smiled, it was with difficulty.

"Ah, Comrade Chico, good morning," he said to Chico who greeted him heartily. "Is the soup ready, madame?" he asked.

With a cry of dismay, Diane flew to the stove.

"Monsieur Gobin, forgive me. I forgot all about it," she confessed. She poured the soup into a bowl and handed it to him. He did not accept it.

"Will Madame not take it over to her? My wife would be so glad to see you," he suggested.

"Surely—this very minute!" she cried, gaily. She crossed to the table. "Look!" she pointed at the open pasteboard box, in which was visible a

froth of lace and gauze. "See what Chico brought me!"

"Wonderful!" Gobin exclaimed, with a show of interest, as of one indulging a little girl.

"I'll show them to Madame Gobin—I'll put them on for her—shall I? Would it perhaps please her?"

"Do!" said Gobin. "It will cheer her, eh?"

She nodded eagerly as, holding the soup-bowl in one hand, she tucked the box of clothes under the other arm. Chico had gone to the window before her. He held it open, as she stepped onto the wooden box to reach the sill.

"I'll carry these across the roofs for you," he said.

"No—no—don't trouble. I can do it," she assured him.

"But it is none too safe," he suggested.

"I'm not afraid!" she said.

"Oh, brave now, eh?" he smiled.

Quietly Diane replied, "I shall never be afraid again!"

"That's the idea, that!" he approved, as he helped her to gain a better hold on the bowl. She was about to step up to the low sill, her foot was, in fact, upon it, when his hand on her arm detained her. She turned to him, her fearless eyes in his.

"Do you know something?" His enunciation was a bit frayed with emotion.

"What?" she asked.

"You are—you are—it is wonderful the way you have stitched my coat. It is—much better than new."

"Is it?" she whispered, and her whisper was a kiss.

"And—and your cooking—tct—tct!" His eyes and nose bent to the bowl in her hand. "You know, I didn't know it, but a man is not complete without a wife—my wife!" The words floated on a deep vibrating note, as he lingered upon them.

She leaned for support against the casing of the window; could one die of happiness? she wondered—

"Say it again," she murmured dreamily.

"My wife!" he repeated, more softly, more deeply.

A smile overspread her face that must have been foolish, had it not been touching—but does a flower seem foolish when it smilingly turns its face to the life-giving sun?

"Say it again!"

"My—" he nearly said it again! He awoke just in time. "Here! stop that!" he shouted. "Get

A William Fox Production.

THE VULMIRS VISIT THEIR NIECES.

Seventh Heaven.

along with you! Out about your business! Shoo!"

He pushed her laughing onto the ledge. Her eyes were merry now, as she turned a roguish glance of farewell upon him. He watched her out of sight; then turned with a kindled face toward the room, striking a match to relight his extinct pipe.

Stepping as carefully as a cat past Madame Gobin's flower box, Diane entered that attic of marital bliss. But no longer did she envy the secure wife; why, indeed, should she envy anyone? Had not the sky opened and vouchsafed *her* all bliss, indeed?

"You are shining, little Diane; what has happened?" queried Madame Gobin.

For answer, Diane pointed to the box under her arm. Then, still silently, she dipped into it—drew forth the foamy white thing that lay there in state.

"Oh-h-h!" breathed Madame Gobin. "A wedding gown!"

And then two feminine heads were put together, two feminine tongues fell to wagging, and the soup turned cold as a stone.

While Diane was putting on the wonderful gown, proud in it array of gauzy ruffles and snowy bows, the two men were talking soberly in the other attic.

Gobin, standing at the window and staring down into the street, had called Chico to look at the crowd

below. It was growing with every instant: men and women were gathering, with excited cries that mingled in a subdued but waxing roar. The far-away roar arose to the two where they stood, watching, listening in Diane's Seventh Heaven. Then they turned and faced one another, each silently asking of the other the terrible question, each, in turn, silently replying.

It must mean war.

War. For Gobin, the honest, hard-working citizen, with a wife whom he loved and a child on the threshold of existence. War. For Chico, only just coming into his estate of marriage, with a wife whom he had just discovered was the sun of his being. War—for rich and poor, for brave and cowardly, for the few who desired it and the many who shuddered away from its name. War.

It would spoil everything! thought Chico, for the moment scowling like a spoiled child. His eyes smouldered wrathfully, as he looked into the square. Like ants the little people were scurrying about, gathering in excited knots, scattering only to form again in other combinations; his glance lost focus—he saw Diane—this room—that was to have been, for long years to come, their Heaven—all the new,

fresh dream of happy days—scattered—destroyed —ruined—and in his heart was hot revolt.

It was all very well for Gobin to tell him that he must not think of himself now—must put his country above all else. Chico didn't like bullets, blood and pain. For the moment the terrible fact surged over him like an icy tide—the fact that he was afraid.

What was this Gobin was saying? That their regiment was on the first list? That he, Gobin, had been told by the Captain that he would be Sergeant? That, if the call should come, they of the 21st Genie would have to mobilize within the hour at the Gare du Nord? Yes, now he thought of it, Chico knew that he had received the notice, but he had thrust it thoughtlessly into a pocket. He couldn't grasp this thing. He was too much occupied with his personal affairs. And he was afraid —yes, he, Chico, was sure he was afraid! He was thinking, too, of Diane. How could he leave her —almost his wife?

Of a sudden he glanced at Gobin. The stern, good face of the older man wore a look of sorrowful tenderness. Chico realized that he was thinking of *not* one, but two.

He was ashamed. He begged Gobin's pardon, and the men's hands clasped.

Turning away from Gobin, Chico went back to the window, where he stood again, searching with his eyes for some hint of what must be going on down there in the square.

Gobin let himself out of the room, his heart heavy with apprehension. On the landing he stopped and waited a moment, for a lady was ascending and the stairs were narrow. As she reached the top she addressed him in a weak voice. The flights were long, and she had climbed a prodigious number of them—she was much out of breath.

To her question Gobin replied that Chico was in his attic, and pointed back to the room he had just left. The door still stood ajar. The lady, who now entered, was Aunt Valentine.

CHAPTER XV

BRISSAC BRINGS NEWS

"Ah, *ma chèrie!* But you are lovely! It fits—it fits as if it had been made for you alone. What a gown—like a *méringue!*"

The motherly Madame Gobin clasped her hands in ecstasy. Does ever woman reach the point where she fails to be thrilled over nuptial affairs?

Diane was fluttering before her, hovering, like a big white butterfly in her gauze finery. Madame Gobin, more practical than poetical, had likened her to a *méringue;* but, whether butterfly or white of egg, at least she was quite the fluffiest, flutteringest, creature ever seen. It was indeed true, the gown which Chico had so proudly bought, guessing in masculine rashness at the size, fitted her to perfection. The slippers, too, were there, and the white rose that he himself had worn.

Diane beamed like a sun shining through white clouds. She preened herself like a happy bird before the mirror.

"At eleven o'clock! Think of it—so soon—

eleven! We are to be married! It's a dream come true!" she cried.

Madame Gobin, the motherly, smiled with delight. "And what a bride you will be! How I wish I could see the ceremony!"

Diane gave her an impulsive hug. "Dear Madame Gobin! But you too are to have a great happiness, as great as mine, perhaps!"

"Or greater—who knows?" murmured the other in reverie.

"Diane! Come here!"

The call rang along the roof, entered the window of Madame Gobin. At the sound Diane flushed to her temples.

"It's Chico! He wants me." She had an air that amounted to proud wifehood already. That anyone should want her was wine to the veins of poor little Diane—and that it should be Chico!

"Yoo-hoo! Chi—co!" she called through the window. "Com—ing!"

She turned back to her friend.

"I will drop in again before long, to see that all is well with you. Don't be afraid, dear Madame Gobin, the doctor will be here soon, and you must pretend that I am your little sister, and call on me

for whatever is needed. And now I must run home —Chico wants me!"

For a little longer, however, she tarried, beating up the pillows to make her friend more comfortable, placing a glass of water near her, tucking in a blanket and smoothing a sheet. Like a sister indeed she hovered over Madame.

When at last these offices were performed, she turned to the window. As she passed out beside the little garden the verbena and rose geranium gave off a sudden whiff of fragrance as she brushed them —and was gone.

"Chico!" she cried as she went, and again, "Chico!" she repeated nearer. She uttered the name on two notes, at the descending interval of a third. It sounded like a bird call, or the refrain of a little song she might be singing. The man who awaited her listened intently by the door, in the shadowier portion of the room, looking eagerly toward the sun-flooded window.

Suddenly she was there—poised like a dove—on the sill of the window.

But the man was not Chico. He, indeed, had called Diane, but had left the room immediately after. The one who awaited her was Brissac.

Brissac caught his breath sharply. A poignant, pleasurable pang tingled to his finger-tips. His heart, that experienced middle-aged organ, performed the foolish trick of seeming to stop, and after turning over with a thud, raced ahead at break-neck speed.

What was it he had thought on that other haunting and memorable occasion when he had seen her? That she would be beautiful, were she at peace with herself and the world; that she might then look, not like a tragic mask, but an angel in a stained glass window, with the sun shining through. There she was—the attic window framed her—the deep burning blue sky, like translucent enamel, made a background against which she stood, all white and gold, and warm,—glowing as though the sun actually suffused her being. Her slender waist and shoulders rose delicate and lily-like from the froth of floating white draperies which billowed about her. Chico's white rose was bound over one ear by a wide silver ribbon; her feet were shod in silver. Illumined by the light of Heaven, and by the inward light of her love, she seemed ineffably lovely, transformed, proud.

Brissac stood motionless, and for a moment so did

Diane, each looking speechlessly at the other. She broke the silence.

"Oh," she said, a little aghast, the light seeming to fade from her as she stepped down onto the box. "You!" she added, standing poised again.

"Yes." He now came forward, eagerly smiling. "Your old friend, the policeman!"

She did not answer his smile as she stepped to the floor. "But what are you doing here? Where is Chico?" She was quick to take alarm.

"Downstairs," he replied. "He has been generous enough to leave us together for a few moments."

"To leave us together?" A frown gathered her brows. "Is anything the matter?" she asked apprehensively.

"I am here," he explained, " at the earnest request of your Aunt. She has just been here, and I followed her, to be of what assistance I could. She and Chico have retired while you and I should have a little talk."

"Aunt Valentine has been *here?*"

"Yes. She wants you to come back to them," he appealed to her.

"But it is too late now!" she exclaimed.

"It is never too late," he assured her, not understanding.

"Yes," she insisted, "I am going to be married." Seeing startled protest in his gesture and glance she hurried on: "And I don't want to talk, please! Where is Chico?" she demanded, again going toward the door.

He hastily barred the way. "You are going to listen to me, Diane," he said in a shaken voice.

"But I have no time," she retorted, trying impatiently to reach the door.

"Chico is a fine fellow," he admitted to conciliate and to gain time.

"Yes, he is," she agreed shortly.

"But, after all, he is a sewer man," he objected.

"He is a street washer!" she corrected.

"Very well, street washer, then," he complied.

"Have you come here to stop our marriage?" she asked curtly.

"Your aunt and I want you to know what you're doing," he pleaded. "It is only fair to yourself."

"Why is Chico not here?" she reiterated, ignoring his words.

"He doesn't want to stand in your way."

"Stand in my way?" she repeated.

"He realizes more than you what your marriage to him will mean to you. Good Heavens, child," he cried feelingly, "don't you see that you will be

lifted out of this squalor of sewers and street-washers into a decent environment?"

"I don't care for anything but Chico." She swept his consideration aside—away—off—into the limbo of unimportant and forgotten things.

Once again she made an attempt to reach the door. This time he did not interpose himself between her and her goal. He turned aside to give her free passage.

"I wish I could say that Chico felt the same toward you." He watched her face as he sent his shaft.

She spun toward him. "Why? What has he said?" she asked sharply.

"It is what he has done," he quietly replied.

"Done?" she questioned. "Say what you mean, please."

"To put it bluntly, my poor girl, he has agreed to be paid off."

She said nothing for a moment, but looked blankly at him. "Paid off!" she echoed in a dull tone.

"Yes. To take money to break up this affair."

"Why, that's not true!" It was a cry uttered more in self-protection than in conviction. One must believe—one must believe—or the world

would crash down upon one's heart and extinguish it. "It is not true," she repeated.

"Ask him. He will tell you," he said coldly.

She ran to the door, opened it, and leaning over the railing, called down the long perspective of descending stairs.

"Chico!" Her voice echoed hollow through the gloom. She stood waiting, a prey to creeping doubts that were gnawing their way into the stronghold of her trust.

"My child," Brissac was murmuring into her ear, "it is as well to discover the truth in the beginning—"

"Chico!" she called, unlistening, unheeding.

"Diane," he pleaded, coming closer, "try to put yourself in your aunt's—in my—place. My child! My dear!"

"Chico!" Desperation was gaining upon her. Where was he? Why did he not come? What was to be done? Could they take her away without her consent? Force her against her will to go?

"Don't you see for yourself," he went on rapidly, his breath on her cheek, "that we only want to save you from untold misery?"

"Chico!" she cried wildly. (Help! *Bon Dieu*, send him!)

Far down below, she heard Chico's answering voice. "Yes?" he asked.

"Come up here quick!" she almost screamed. "Ah!" she groaned her relief. "He is coming!" She turned back into the room, her heart pounding.

Brissac followed. "He doesn't love you," he put in hurriedly.

"I don't believe it!" She held tenaciously to her faith again.

"How can you help it? Has he not shown it by what he has done?" He took both her hands. "And you are the kind of girl who must have love to bloom," he hastened on, the words coming faster, more urgent, more intense as he spoke. "Well, we will give you all the love in the world—love you as you have never dreamed you could be loved—" his voice broke— "Have you the remotest idea of what I am trying to tell you?" He searched her face hungrily. "How I would move heaven and earth to protect you—"

Absorbed in her own thoughts, she did not hear him, she did not even see his face, blanched with emotion; leaning back against the table, she drew her hands away from him. "Chico couldn't do it," she continued to repeat under her breath, "he

couldn't do it—he couldn't do it!" Her repetition kept time with Chico's steps, heard bounding up the long flights.

"Here he is," said Brissac, as Chico reached the door. "Ask him."

CHAPTER XVI

TEN THOUSAND FRANCS

Brissac, keenly interested from the beginning in the romantic task of bringing the sisters back to their now-wealthy relatives, had grown more keenly after his first meeting with Diane. That face of an angel in a stained glass window had lingered in his memory, had taken on more radiance the more he reflected upon it. His keenness had spurred on his efforts to their utmost—and the utmost efforts of the brilliant Brissac were seldom unavailing.

True, Monsieur Vulmir had cast off his nieces after the unfortunate meeting in the Hole. But Brissac did not intend to let himself be balked.

His first move was to get Nana out of St. Lazarre Prison. His next, to get in touch with Madame Vulmir.

She was only too ready to claim him as an ally. True, she had never in all her obedient married life gone against the wishes of Georges Vulmir. But she determined to go against them now. With the clever and (so it seemed to her) omnipotent

Colonel's aid, she would seek Diane and take her from the life into which she had been dragged.

"Her situation has changed since you saw the girl, Madame," Brissac said to her. "She is now in the attic of a sewer man."

Madame Vulmir raised her hands in horror. Worse and worse! The child must be rescued at once. The alarmed Madame Vulmir saw her being carried off bodily into the sewer itself.

Brissac had not neglected the case for a moment; he had employed his efficient secretary, Paul Recan, to watch the Hole and to report to him every detail of news. He arranged that Aunt Valentine and he should call at the attic. Between them, he was sure, the affair could be managed neatly and quickly. If the sewer man should demur, a little matter of ten thousand francs might be mentioned to him, he suggested. Aunt Valentine nodded approvingly.

Thus, they appeared, on the very morning when Diane had donned her wedding gown, and Boul was due to arrive at eleven o'clock to drive the happy bride and bridegroom to the ceremony, Aunt Valentine alighted from an automobile before the door that led to the Seventh Heaven. Brissac was detained from joining her by the pressure of war prospects, but she decided to mount the stairs alone and

A William Fox Production.

"SHE IS MY WIFE."

Seventh Heaven.

have it out with the sewer man. Now that she had mutinied, after all these years of docility, Aunt Valentine was coming to be a very brave person indeed!

And so, finding Chico alone in his attic where Gobin had just left him, she had told him the full truth of the situation: she had come to claim her niece—to take her to a luxurious home where she would be surrounded by love, and would have the atmosphere of comfort and good breeding to which she had been born and which was her due. Incidentally she mentioned the fact that ten thousand francs had been suggested by Colonel Brissac as a fitting compensation. Aunt Valentine meant to do the right thing, and to do it liberally.

The suggestion of francs was scarcely heard by Chico. Dumbfounded, he was only dimly sensing the fact that Diane was to be taken from him—that this woman had come to carry away the one creature that life had given him to love.

For a while he fought. He argued that Diane loved him, that she would not wish to leave him. But, with all the appeal of her sex, Madame Vulmir pleaded, even though Diane might for the moment cling to him, she would in the end thank him for letting her go. Such love as hers, for a man so far

beneath her, must inevitably fade. She was young yet—she would soon forget.

For Diane's sake!

That was what roused Chico from his sultry brooding. For himself—never! Never would he give her up! But if it meant Diane's happiness—what right had he to stand in her way?

"Very well, then," he had said. "I suppose it must be."

Brissac arrived and was delighted to hear from Madame Vulmir that this young Chico had agreed to everything—that he would resign his claim completely, and let Diane go. Neither of the two guessed the agony that was wringing Chico's soul as he stood aside to let them have their way. Death would be easier!

Brissac walked about the room briskly, smug in the success of his undertaking. Thank fortune it had succeeded so well! All was ready now for the happy dènouement. He had the cheque for ten thousand francs in his pocket, the motor waited below, they would take Diane at once. Where was she? He looked about taking in the details of the little room, so mean, so contemptible, his eye skimming over Chico as over an inanimate object.

Chico, his eyes riveted on Brissac, matched his scorn.

He leaned out of the window. "Diane!" After a pause—"Dia-ane!" he repeated—a catch of pain breaking the word into two minor notes. Then louder and more steadily—"Diane! Come here!"

Faintly, in the distance, her cry was audible to them all: "Yoo-hoo!" she called back, "Chico! Com-ing!"

He faced them, anguish in his eyes; laboring with the effort to remain calm, he crossed to the door. They would have to tell Diane of the arrangement—that was the least he could ask. They had robbed him of all that he held dear: now let them carry out their cruel work without his presence.

And so he went, to wait outside his own dwelling-place while these two should tell Diane that she was to enter upon a new life—she who had only today entered upon any life at all.

"After all, one must be sorry for him, if he *is* only a sewer man!" Aunt Valentine observed to Brissac.

At this the Colonel took alarm. Was there danger of the good lady weakening? He would meet Diane alone.

Politely but sternly now he took command. He led Aunt Valentine to the door. If there was to be

a scene of sentiment and hesitations, of indecision and questionings, the good lady must be disposed of elsewhere for the moment.

He would bring Diane at once, he promised, with all the rash assurance with which men and mice proverbially propose to carry out the schemes of which God alone has the disposal.

With relief he watched Aunt Valentine rustle along the landing and down the steep stairs; then he closed the door quickly and softly. His hand was still on its fastening, when Diane arrived.

Mice and men, forsooth!

That brief interview with Diane left Brissac gasping. He had never doubted, for a moment, his own ability to handle any situation—least of all, an argument with an angel in a stained glass window! Such a gentle angel! He had supposed her to be the most plastic of creatures. And here she was, vigorously denying the truth of his statements, calling upon Chico to defend her, battling like a little savage to maintain what she deemed to be her rights.

Brissac coughed and stroked his moustache. Rather embarrassing, to be sure. But Madame Vulmir had stated that the young sewer man had agreed to everything. Let Diane see for herself!

She ran to Chico as he entered, crying out to him to know if it was true, this thing that Brissac was telling her. She was unconscious of the change in her appearance. She had left his attic not long before in her old rusty black, and had flown back into it, a white angel, during his absence.

He paused on the threshold and looked at her with new eyes, as if he had never seen her before. Was this radiant creature—this alluring apparition, in white and silver, that seemed to fill the place with the perfume of her beauty—was this the grim object he had three days ago found with his knife in her hand, on the point of ending her drab, intolerable existence?

He spoke at last. He didn't know that she belonged to such grand people, he told her, dolefully. He hadn't understood. But now that he did understand——

She looked miserably at him. Then it must all be true—that he was giving her up to them, that she was to leave her Heaven—

And how changed she seemed to him! She was so splendid now, in the wedding finery, and he seemed so little in his own estimation! His life—what was it, after all, that he had to offer her? Why, the very hose seemed now no larger than a

piece of macaroni! He had thought he could hold this fugitive vision of light and warmth—he had thought himself a king, with a kingdom to share with her. And now she was going to vanish forever, and leave him alone. And he must not stretch out his hands to hold her back.

But what was that? Diane speaking—Diane crying out to him—she could not bear it—she could not leave him—nobody should drag her from him—if only he would let her stay—always near him—

He could not believe his ears. Still he fought on—fought for her happiness, as he had been told it was, against his own desire. He would not stand between her and a life of luxury, he told her—But what was she saying about money—money—what money?

It was ten thousand francs she was talking about, and she was saying that if he had taken it in exchange for her, she wanted him to give it back and to keep her!

To be sure, Madame Vulmir had offered him this money, but he had scarcely heard her, so stupefied was he by the thought of giving up Diane. He had not heeded her offer enough to be insulted by it. And now Brissac was stepping forward, smugly

bringing forth a cheque from his pocket, holding it out—

Chico uttered the most forciful word in his vocabulary. Never for a moment had he thought of accepting money. What he had done, he had done for Diane's happiness. Take money—for *her*—bah! He looked down upon Brissac from measureless heights.

Brissac's hand closed with a jerk of irritation upon the cheque.

But Diane rushed to him, clinging. She had known it all along—it was not true, he had not taken money for her. Ah, he must want indeed to keep her, as much as she wanted to stay! Now they would never be parted!

Muttering in some embarrassment that he had understood from Madame Vulmir that Chico had accepted the terms, and that all was arranged, Brissac pocketed the cheque carefully with one hand; the other, he doubled into a defensive fist. For already Chico's eyes were glittering as the situation revealed itself to him, and this young giant from the sewer was no mean enemy. Chico was disengaging himself from Diane's arms while he demanded of Brissac whether he had really told Diane that payment had been made—for her.

The diplomatic Brissac attempted an easy reply, but a certain nervousness was evident. Broader and broader grew Chico's shoulders; more and more glittering his eyes.

Diane ran between them as they faced each other with eyes that seemed to stab and destroy.

"You must not, Chico," she cried, holding him. She turned a bloodless face toward the Colonel, and begged him to go.

Brissac looked at her for a moment steadily, as she stood between them. He was a good officer, and a good soldier as well; in the latter capacity he must not waste strength, resources and ammunition; in the former he must wisely recognize temporary defeat and withdraw his forces with order and dignity.

Slowly he picked up his hat and walked toward the door. There he turned. If he had made a mistake, he told her, with his unalterable urbanity, he was sorry. He had misunderstood—and if she should ever need him— The end of his sentence was expressed in the bow with which he placed himself at Diane's command always. With that he left the room.

CHAPTER XVII

"I AM BRAVE!"

"*Mon Dieu,* I had almost lost you!" A poignant note both of dismay and relief sharpened Chico's cry, as he impetuously folded Diane in his arms.

"Let us stay like this forever," she whispered, clinging to him.

"Yes!" he assented blissfully.

"Never listen to anyone any more," she pleaded, cheek to cheek, "you are so noble!"

"It is my weakness," he admitted. "Never again will I be noble!"

"No—please!" she begged.

"At the thought of losing you, I am still wobbling inside—listen!" He put her head on his heart which pounded thickly, like a too potent engine. "Diane," he said, bending over her bowed head, "I love you!"

She looked up with swimming eyes. "At last!" —there was a little catch in her throat—"You said it all by yourself!"

He looked at her, puzzled by the tears that brimmed her lids.

"I'm not used to being happy," she explained tremulously, "it is funny, it hurts! I can't believe it yet! Hold me close, Chico—no—closer!" She closed her eyes, tasting the sweetness of this embrace which hurt.

"Never leave me again, Diane," he murmured brokenly, "or like a candle I shall simply go out!"

From far down in the streets arose a faint echo of many footsteps in rhythmic beat—it was scarcely audible—it was as distant and as yet undefined as the heart-beat of France itself. But audible it was to Chico's unwilling and resisting ear.

"I am afraid," he said, sitting down dizzily on the chair beside the table.

Diane broke away from him laughing. "Afraid? Afraid of love and happiness? For shame, Chico!" She kneeled beside him. "Courage! That's the idea, that!" she cried, imitating him quaintly.

"I said that! How easy it was to talk!" he said meekly, "Now I shake like a blanc-mange!"

"Then lean on me!" she said rising. He wrapped his arms about her waist and leaned his head upon her breast, his eyes closed in utter content. Oh, to remain so forever—

The foot-steps down there had ceased.

"Trust me," she continued, "for I will be brave, and I will make you brave, as you have made me! I will cook for you, and sew for you—I will be beautiful for you—and strong for you—and wise for you," her words rang exultantly. "Never again will I be afraid!" She took a few steps back away from him. "I astonish myself with what I am! You see what you have made of me? I, too, am a very remarkable fellow!"

As she stood there, so gay, in her sweetly ironical mimicry of his attitudes and inflections, in the gallant tilt of her head, and the toss of one hand above her head—it was, as Boul had once said, a marvel that Chico did not gobble her up.

The footsteps had recommenced their ominous tap and shuffle—

He held out his arms. She flew to them, and he drew her across his knees in a long, close embrace.

"Come," she cried, suddenly starting to her feet. "Let us get married at once—quick!" Her shining eyes, her flushed face, her crimson lips and tumbled hair, all spoke as urgently as her words.

"Good heavens, yes," he assented, snatching up his *beret*, "we shall have to hurry!"

"Boul must be below, waiting with Eloise."

"I'll look," he replied, going to the window, and craning to see the street directly below.

His face turned to grey stone.

Diane had run to the mirror. She hastily made passes over her curls, which seemed to have the effect of both smoothing and ruffling them. Turning, her glance fell upon Chico's frozen mask.

"What is it?" she cried sharply.

The marching feet grew louder.

"He is not there," said Chico heavily.

"Are you sure?" she asked. She went toward the window to see for herself.

"Don't look!" he said gently.

But she had seen—they were marching—down there—with flags—muffled drums were audible. It had come! They both stood, dumbly surveying the street.

Diane turned slowly toward him. They looked long into each other's eyes. "I am not afraid!" she said.

"It is war!"

Both turned with a start, to see Gobin, a military *kepi* on the back of his head, a blue uniform coat on one arm, and a bundle under the other, enter the room by a window.

"It is war!" he repeated, wiping his perspiring

face with a bandana handkerchief. He went directly to Diane. "Madame Chico, will you take care of my wife—and welcome my boy for me, when he comes?"

"Be comforted, Monsieur Gobin," she reassured him, "I will nurse them both."

"Thank you." He crossed to the door; "Come, Chico, we report at the Gare du Nord. I—I—have said good-bye to my wife."

"Snake of snakes!" Chico distractedly clutched his harrassed head.

"I will wait for you below," said Gobin kindly. "Hurry, Comrade," he urged as he left them.

"I am not afraid," Diane was still smiling bravely.

Chico broke away from her glance, to drag his scattered thoughts back to the moment's exigencies. He produced a paper from under his shirt. "The women will take the men's places," he said, laying it down on the table. This is a certificate from the priest,—"

She had pulled a cloth bag from a drawer. Both were hastily stuffing it with a jumbled collection of articles, a shirt—socks—soap—tobacco.

Suddenly he stopped short in his feverish search for a favorite pipe. "No," he said shortly, "you must go back to your aunt."

"I will stay here! I shall be in your place! It will keep me nearer to you!" she pleaded.

"But"—he made a wild gesture,—"that paper says: 'For your wife', and you are not my wife!"

His hand came down smartly upon the table. A sudden idea seized him: "I have it!" he exclaimed intently. "We will marry ourselves here—now!"

"Yes," she assented, "with these." She pointed to the priest's medals lying on the table.

"I am an atheist, but this time I must appeal to someone. It is a good idea—this *Bon Dieu*—if it were only true," he added, hesitating.

"Do you know that it is not?" she asked seriously.

Chico, not heeding, added, "I will give Him one more test."

He took her hand in his. They stood facing each other across the table. He looked up, in an attitude of devout address.

"Monsieur *le Bon Dieu*," he prayed, after his fashion, "perhaps you are here, perhaps not. Perhaps you give me this wife, perhaps not. But if there is any truth in the Idea of You, please make this a true marriage." With reverence he placed the chain with one of the medals about her neck. "I take you, Diane, for my wife."

She picked up the other medal, kissed it, and put

it in his hand: "I take you Chico, for my husband —forever!"

Down there, faint and shrill, bugles were calling. Drums beat insistently, footfalls tapped and shuffled, voices made that faint murmur of wind in the pines—

"Now we are married," he whispered.

"Yes," she whispered in reply.

He kissed the medal she had given him, and put it in the pocket above his heart.

Down there, faint music sounded—the brass of many instruments playing the Marseillaise, making reluctant feet step out more lightly, heartening the heavy of heart, cheering the cheerless.

Chico turned his pockets inside out, and laid the money from them in a pile on the table. He picked up his bag.

"Now I go!"

There was a quick embrace. Oh, that its imprint might last until the next! Let this one bridge the gulf of distance and time and danger! Diane held his hands tightly between hers. Oh, to retain the sense of that loving handclasp, the comfort of the strong, warm pressure!

"I am not afraid!" Let that be her last word to him.

He turned to the door. She drew her shawl from a peg, and threw it over her head, about to follow him.

"No, no," he cried, "don't come with me. Don't follow me."

She entreated him mutely, her longing swaying her like a wind-blown birch-tree.

From a bell-tower near by a chime struck the hour. It was eleven o'clock.

"No!" He stood near the door, one hand held up in command and blessing. "Stand still! Don't move!" he said. "I want to see you last like this! Let me fill my eyes with you!"

His gaze rested on her, engraving her image in the fibre of his brain.

"I shall come to you each morning at this hour. Every day you will feel me here with you—" he said, his whole person grown almost august with the high grief of parting.

Seeing his pain reflected in her face, he essayed a light laugh. "*Au revoir*—Heaven!" he added under his breath, lest his voice break again as it had in the midst of the laugh.

He was gone.

Diane stood still, her eyes fixed on the closed door, until the unbearableness of the empty place

broke over her; carried on a wave of panic and struggling between her desire to follow and the wish to obey Chico's last request, she stood leaning against the door. It slowly opened—she felt the push of it against her back. Instinctively she bore her weight upon it to hold it shut, but a body heavier than her own was forcing it open.

Diane tottered forward, unable longer to retain her foothold against the intruder. She turned quickly to the open door.

Nana stood on the threshold.

The two faced each other silently for a moment. The elder woman's face was livid and swollen. Startled though Diane was by her presence, it was Nana's ghastly pallor, her turbid glance, which most struck her, after the three days' interval since she had last seen her.

"I've been hiding in the hall, until your sewer man got out," Nana cried hoarsely.

Diane came to her side, looking anxiously into her ravaged face. She put a pitying hand to her sister's cheek.

"Nana, you are ill!" she mourned.

"Huh! Didn't Boul tell you that I wanted you to come back to me?" asked the other grimly.

Diane retreated, and as she did so Nana advanced upon her.

"Yes," Diane said, trying to evade her and reach the door, "but Chico has gone—I must—"

Nana stopped her; gripping her by the arm she held her, savagely speaking into her face; "The war's got him!"

"Nana, please—I want to see him once more. Let me go! Please!" Diane repeated with a quiet firmness with which Nana was not acquainted. Nana's eye travelled over her, taking in other details of novelty and strangeness—the gleaming garments, only partially hidden by the well-known dingy black shawl of the Hole in the Sock days. Her eyes, sweeping from feet to forehead, were caught by the glitter of the silver medal hung about Diane's neck. She clutched at it and with a quick jerk tore it from her.

"What's this thing?" she asked, "something *he* gave you?"

Like a skillfully laid brushwood pile into which a spark is dropped, Diane took sudden flame.

"*Give—that—back—to—me!*" Her words came

crisply, like the first, sharp crackle of twigs but now ignited.

"Huh?" Nana was puzzled, catching an unwonted staccato quality of Diane's speech.

"Give—that—back, I tell you!" There was in the words the ominous undertone that is the forerunner of approaching devastation by fire.

Nana threw the medal on the floor at her feet. So much for that part of her answer. For the rest, her way of dealing with Diane would be the unfailingly effectual one. The snake-whip, her familiar weapon, was in Nana's hand.

"Come here to me," she commanded brutally.

Diane did not move. "I'm not afraid of you, Nana!" She was a white pillar of fire.

"Huh!" Nana was incredulous;—mocking.

"I'm not afraid, I tell you!" repeated Diane in a cry that quivered and climbed, like quivering, climbing flames.

"Come here to me!" shrieked Nana, brandishing the whip in her upraised hand.

Diane did not shift her ground.

Nana made a forward lunge upon her, bringing down the whip as she came. It fell short of its aim.

Without a word, Diane sprang upon her; silently they struggled for possession of it. Irresistible in

the intensity of her emotion, Diane tore it from Nana's hand, flinging her, by the same motion, away from her. Nana staggered backward, overturning a chair, her face drawn with terror.

"I'll kill you, Nana!"

The blaze of her passion filled the room; before her Nana fled as before a conflagration—fled for her life, scarcely feeling the lash which beat upon her. She fell, dragging the table down with her; then picking herself up she staggered to the door, as one driven by the Furies.

"You can never frighten me again!" cried Diane, still in pursuit, "I am brave! I am not afraid!" With each shout, the whip in her hand cut whistling through the air, sometimes striking Nana, sometimes missing her, "I am brave! I am the wife of Chico!"

Nana was stumbling down the stairs, but hunched as small as she could make herself, she was still a target for the whip which Diane flung down after the retreating figure.

She turned and sped to the window where, leaning far out over the sill, exhausted, hysterial, she waved her shawl to the columns marching below, and cried exultantly: "*Chico! Chico! I am brave!*

CHAPTER XVIII

THE FOURTH YEAR

Night gloomed through the streets of Paris—Paris in war. In lonely houses women waited for news, for home-comings—and there was neither. Some cafés were dull and dark, others were feverishly busy, as men sought to forget their misery.

The great shell factory roared on. The night hours did not give it pause. Faster, ever faster, it must turn out the tools of death. Death was greedy ——it clamored for more tools, more, more, to make an end to this thing. Large shells, small shells, munitions of every sort, always some new type which would prove more deadly than the last.

Over the long tables girls by the dozens—scores—hundreds, bent at their work. They were making munitions as fast as their fingers could fly, death-wielding things for their men to hurl. The din of machinery maddened their ears, their lungs were choked with brass filings, their eyes smarted with the metallic dust and long hours of waking.

As sodden gray dawn crawled in, their muscles

sagged. But the night shift was not done yet—not till sunrise. This gray hour of the morning, when human vitality is at its lowest ebb, must make no halt in the speed. Hurry! More tools of death!

At sun-up it was over, and the night shift wearily departed to give way to the luckier ones whose toil was of the day.

From the midst of the crowd two girls, a plump and a thin one, singled themselves out to find one another. With dragging footsteps they set off on their way to home and breakfast, too tired, for the time, even to speak. Their shabby and dust-filled garments were the standardized suits of the munitions worker. They carried each a black tin lunch box which had contained the midnight meal: one had a paper bag of potatoes, evidently the supplies for home consumption.

Not until they reached No. 48 Rue Notre Dame de Lorette did they find voice. Then they turned in, beginning slowly to mount the long flights, as one murmured:

"At least there's a home to go to!"

For there were many, God pity them, who had not even a roof. But in this, the fourth year of the war, Chico's attic still stood; and Chico's attic still sheltered Diane—and, with her, Arlette.

Everyone knows, what those years meant—the long hope and the despair, the patience and the wrath; the miracles of heroism and devotion, and the wonders of pusillanimity and deception, of unheeding selflessness and of heedless selfishness, of madness and of superhuman calm, of blood and tears, and of escape and prayerful laughter.

This morning the same old sun poured through the same old skylight of "Heaven" that had streamed in on that morning in early August long past; but "Heaven" was not the same. When, in recent years, a windowpane had been broken, one stuffed it with newspaper; when the roof leaked one set a basin under the spot where the water fell, and did not complain. In any case, there was no one to complain to who acknowledged responsibility concerning leaks and window-panes. The landlord of 48 Rue Notre Dame de Lorette like the glazers and tinsmiths had gone out there.

A rusty sewing machine was now established in one corner; women's clothing hung about from the nails, and a clothesline stretched across an angle supported drying garments of a feminine cut.

It was a wan and tired attic that had seen hard days and nights. The haggard days of the Prussian advance and the horrid nights of Zeppelin raids had

left their traces not on human bodies and faces alone. Storm, stress and strain had also made their mark on the wood and stone and plaster of "Heaven."

As the two weary girls were getting their breakfast, Diane broke the silence.

"I shall have to get along with my wages alone for support now, Arlette," she said. "A message was handed to me last evening. Aunt Valentine is dead."

"Oh, Diane!"

"It makes me very sad that I could not have been with her, for she always wanted me. But going to her would have meant giving up Chico—she insisted that I should break my marriage."

"Yes, but your—*marriage!* Diane!"

Diane glanced at her friend with a weary smile. She knew what Arlette's exclamation meant. People persisted in looking at her with pitying eyes and headshakes when she spoke of the bond. They seemed to think it was not a real marriage, after all—only a childish make-believe. Except, indeed, the good Father—Pere Chevillon.

"Ah, my child, who shall say that it was not as sacred a ceremony as any other?" he had once said to her. "You and Chico believed with your hearts that you were joining yourselves in the holy bond.

The *Bon Dieu* has a place in his heart for such faith as yours!"

And, during all these years, Diane had held firmly to her belief. She was Chico's wife. Just as much as if the Church had made them one. He had been at the front ever since, but one day he would return —to her, and Seventh Heaven.

And she held to another belief, too. It was that every morning, at precisely eleven o'clock as he had promised, Chico came to her in this Seventh Heaven. Chico was there, in the spirit, and as actually as if in the flesh.

Through thick and thin she had clung to the little attic, had labored and managed, in one way and another, to pay the rent. Heaven must not be abandoned. She must hold it fast, so that Chico could come every morning in spirit as long as the war should last. And, better yet, so that Chico himself, the whole of him, could return and find her waiting there when the war should be over.

The war over! Little prospect there was of that!

With the months it had only grown greater, more world-consuming. First France and Belgium alone, then England drawn in, and the others—later

America,—and still, more and more madly, they all fought on.

"My beloved girl," Aunt Valentine had written "if only you could give up this fancy that you are married, and return to us! I am sure you would soon win over your uncle, if he could see you. He could not hold out in his coldness. And, although the house has been much altered from its old days, you would find your own little room ready for you. The lilacs are in bloom now down by the arbor, and Ami—will you believe it? Old Ami is still alive, and I am sure he will know you, and bark with joy!"

This was one of the letters that had made Diane's heart ache. How she longed to fill that beloved life with happiness! But she would not yield. For she must be in the attic, ready for Chico.

On this particular morning the girls had dragged heavy feet up the six flights to their room. Work grew harder and harder, and the night shift was much more taxing than that of the day. But with their coffee, their spirits revived a bit; and Arlette's face, still plump although much older than formerly, took on more cheerful lines.

"Diane, I've got something to tell you," she confided at last.

"Yes, dear?" Diane tried to smile, as at a child.

Arlette had so many childish secrets! In spite of the wear and tear of the war years (and a brave and loyal little war worker she had been, too), she still kept her interest in beaux, and in her own prettiness. Indeed she had somehow acquired a vanity case, and was using a lipstick!

"Diane—we're to be put on the day shift!"

For the moment Diane's face lighted. The day shift! It had been her great desire. She was so exhausted with the night work that over and over she had been afraid of collapsing and giving out completely. If she could only have the nights for sleep—

Suddenly her face darkened. "How did this come about, Arlette?" she demanded as a suspicion seized her.

Arlette hesitated, fiddled with her spoon, coughed.

"How?" Diane persisted.

"Now, Diane! Surely you're not going to refuse every kindness that Colonel Brissac has to offer? There's no harm in letting him get us a better position!"

Diane turned white. "How often must I tell you that I will accept nothing at his hands? Nothing! Nothing!"

"Well, anyway, if you're so foolish, I'm not!"

muttered Arlette. "I'm going to take the day job, and be thankful!"

Diane made no reply, but fell to clearing the breakfast away. During all the period of war, whenever Brissac found himself in Paris, he had showered Diane with attentions which she rejected coldly, almost angrily. She had told him once and for all that she was Chico's wife—was not that enough?

"Madame Chi-co!"

A childish voice piped her name just outside the window. Diane looked up with a quick, happy smile.

"Ah! Good morning, my young soldier! How brave are you today in your fine new uniform! How proud your father would be if he could see you now!"

"I'm ready to march away to the front. I'm going to be a brave soldier, and fire my gun for France!" piped the valiant little voice, as the boy raised his chest and displayed his wee soldier suit.

"That's a fine Maximilian! Courage—that's the Idea!" Diane responded, as she caught the child up and hugged him. She alone knew the meaning that her own words held for her.

"You mustn't pick me up. I'm a soldier!" he said, squirming. "And I brought you a bouquet."

With laughing thanks she took the bunch of bright flowers that he now presented with a stateliness of manner worthy the Maximilian for whom he was named.

"Mother wants you to come to her room. She has something to show you."

"Very well. Now, you must march ahead! An advance guard, to protect me! T-r-r-r-r-p! T-r-r-r-rp! T-r-rp, t-r-rp, t-r-rp!" she drummed with forced gaiety as she followed the little boy. With chest protruding, head high, he marched as importantly as though he had been the entire French army, back over the roof to his mother's window. Diane forgot her weariness and unhappiness in laughing at him; he was so ridiculously, comically, like that haughty father of his!

"Good morning, dear Madame!"

"Good morning, chérie!" Madame Gobin welcomed her with a plump kiss. "I want you to see my pile of socks! All done! Isn't that a fine array?"

"You are marvellous! I believe you knit in your sleep."

"I sometimes wonder if I do," Madame Gobin admitted with a laugh. "At any rate, I can't see

how so many get finished. But here they are. Have you any news?" she added.

Diane shook her head, and her smile faded as she slipped back once more into the world of heart-wringing anxiety.

"Nor I. I could not keep up my courage at all if it were not for this young soldier who guards his *maman* like the brave man he is," the mother said, smiling through her tears as she looked down upon his tousled head.

"I wish I had not said that," she added to her own thoughts. For she read the look that passed over Diane's face—Diane, who waited alone, with no such consolation as hers. Ah, that strange marriage, which was no marriage, thought Madame Gobin—so curiously binding and sacred, because of the way Diane regarded it—and yet never a marriage at all, as the world knows the meaning of the word. Ah, if she had a child of her own! Diane's look cried. She turned away to the window-garden to hide the springing tears.

"Your flowers are thriving better than ever this season," she said, picking a fragrant leaf of geranium.

"I want to sell some, to make *Maman* rich!" put in the little fellow.

His mother smiled. "The other day he saw a flower-seller no older than he, and he has been begging ever since to be allowed to take the flowers down to the street and sell them. Think of it! Not yet four, and he has some childish notion of helping *Maman!* What a son he will be to lean on!" Madame Gobin sighed tenderly.

There was a tap on the door. "Come in!" they all cried together, and little Maximilian ran to the door to open it, that the visitor, whoever he might be, might be dazzled by his magnificent new uniform.

"*Bon jour*, my children!"

A chubby black-robed figure entered. It was substantially the same as formerly, if perhaps less spontaneously merry. The smiles were not wholly a reflection of inward sunshine; they were a deliberately handled implement of cheer. Alas! The thousands of lads whom it had been necessary to hearten and console with those smiles, where there was, in truth, little or nothing to smile about! Pere Chevillon, in his shovel hat and long cloak, with a Red Cross brassard on his arm, wore the marks of the prolonged storm, patiently and bravely borne in the service of his Master and his Master's children who were his own.

The women greeted him with a cry of joy: "Father! The good Father!"

"The six flights don't grow any fewer as my years grow more!" he said, puffing and laughing and mopping his brow. "I wonder if there's any way to turn old legs into young ones?"

"Sit down and rest, Father, and have a cup of coffee!" urged Madame Gobin. She bustled about to make the beloved priest comfortable.

"Ah, you spoil an old man!" he protested. "Now, then, Eugenie," he went on, turing to Madame Gobin, "what will you say if I bring you a piece of news in return for this good piece of bread, and the coffee?"

"News? Father—Father—it isn't—" she gasped. The mere word "news" sent blood throbbing through the veins these days.

Pere Chevillon looked at her sharply. Would she be able to bear it? he asked himself. Tragedy —yes; the women of France were schooled to bear tragedy. But happiness—that took strength to endure!

He turned to the little boy. "Maximilian, come here," he said. And to the earnestly listening child:

"My little fellow, there is a friend of yours wait-

ing outside—a friend whom you have never seen. Will you welcome him?"

The little boy, puzzled but alert with interest, solemnly nodded.

The priest rose. "Madame—prepare," he said gently. Then he flung open the door. "Maximilian Gobin—I present you to Maximilian Gobin!" he cried.

Ah, the throb of it! The ache of it! The joy of it! Reunited—man and wife—safely together again. One sleeve hung empty from Gobin's coat. But one thought little of an arm or less, those days! Gobin was here, he was safe, he was the same!

He choked, he coughed loudly, he blew his austere Roman nose. Gobin the haughty—he must not show weak emotion, and before women! To cover it, he turned to the child.

Astonishingly, he broke into genuine laughter—the first genuine peal of laughter, perhaps, that the stately Maximilian had ever given way to.

"He is exactly like me!" he cried, doubled with amused appreciation of the likeness. "He holds his back so stiff and his head so high—as if he were already a member of the Hose!"

It was a wonderful hour. As soon as the first shock of surprise and mingled emotions was over,

everybody chattered at once. Arlette, hearing the noise, came skipping across the roof, and added her magpie chatter to the general din. News from the hospital, from the front—reports of the long waiting days at home—how is this one, have you heard from that one—the outlook is bad on one front but promising on another—Gobin had been given beans in the hospital—he hated beans—would Diane make him one of her good onion soups?

And through it all Diane, smiling tenderly upon the little family and its happiness, nevertheless looked on with an ache in her heart. Pere Chevillon watched her. How could he bear to tell her? —and yet, perhaps, any word was better than no word at all.

"My daughter—" he began, drawing her aside.

"Yes, Father?"

"Diane—are you strong?"

For the moment, meeting his grave eyes, she flinched. Then, tightening her lips, she answered, "Yes, Father."

Then—"Chico is reported among the missing, Diane," Pere Chevillon said.

CHAPTER XIV

NOVEMBER

It was on a November morning—the eleventh, to be exact,—that two men, arriving from different directions, turned in at No. 48 Rue Notre Dame de Lorette. The one was clad in priest's robes; the other, in handsome military array of a high rank. As they reached the stairs, they recognized each other, Pere Chevillon and Colonel Brissac. A cordial greeting was exchanged; would either of them ever forget that episode of the stolen tin watch? Brissac chuckled now as he recalled it.

"I hear of your noble work very often, Father," the officer said, as the two stopped for a chat before mounting the stairs. "You are a bearer of cheer wherever you go."

"Ah, my friend, I try to carry jokes to every wounded man. If you run upon any new ones, please save them for me. I ask all my friends to do the same. Little Arlette, now—she was trying to help me out, but I could not make head or tail of the one she gave me. It was all about a goat—how some-

one had cut off its nose—and when I asked her, how did it smell? she replied, 'Terrible!' and burst into laughter. Now I ask you, what is the sense in that? Why should anyone cut off the nose of a poor goat?" The Father shook his head gravely.

Brissac held his sides while he broke into a roar, less at Arlette's joke than at the good priest's puzzlement. "Never mind, Father," he said. "I will think up some jokes for you, and I promise they shall not involve any such cruelty!" And again he roared as they mounted the stairs.

At the top they separated, Pere Chevillon to turn into the Gobin's attic, the other, into Diane's. A swift glance about showed him that Arlette was alone. His cheer crumpled.

"Oh, Colonel Brissac, how good to see you!" she cried, running forward to give him both hands. "I don't know what we should have done if you had not paid the rent for us this month. You are more than generous!"

He disdained her thanks with a shrug. "If I can help her in any way, it is my greatest happiness," he said gloomily. "Does she know?"

Arlette shook her head.

"N-no. I didn't think it safe to tell her yet. She gets rather angry, you know, if she thinks you

help in any way. So I just paid the rent myself with your money, and she thought it was with my own."

Brissac nodded heavily as he seated himself. So Diane's attitude toward him was unchanged!

"What does she think about—about—Chico?" The word evidently stuck in his throat. "Does she still believe him to be alive?"

"Always. After the first shock of hearing that he was among the missing, she rallied, and refused to believe that he was dead. She has stuck to it. She believes firmly that he will return to her."

For the time Brissac said nothing to this. "Well —I see you have not kept your word," he observed, again looking about. "You promised to have her here this morning."

Arlette hung her head like a child that is rebuked. "I'm sorry, Colonel Brissac. But I couldn't help it. She wouldn't stay when she heard you were coming. Perhaps next time—!" she coaxed.

"Always next time!" he said with annoyance. A cat-and-mouse game this! It had become impossible for him even to catch a glimpse of Diane.

"When Diane came in from work she brought the news that we are dismissed, with two hundred other girls. She says we mustn't worry, because it may

mean that war will soon be over, and that's the big thing. She's so fine, Diane—I wish I could live up to her!" the plump Arlette added with a mighty sigh. "But I can't! For my part, *I* can't see how we're to pay for our bread and coffee, let alone everything else!" In her worldly wisdom Arlette had determined to let this generous Colonel know their difficulty at the earliest possible moment.

"Well, Arlette, my plump and pleasing Arlette," he said, "you may be interested to know that Diane's guess was correct. A message came to me just before I left headquarters, that the Armistice may be signed this morning!"

Arlette dropped the coffee pot she was washing, and stared open-mouthed at him.

"And you can tell me that without—without—jumping over the moon, like the cow!" she cried in amazement.

He threw back his head, and laughed heartily. "I fear I resemble more accurately the cow who stands and watches a train go past," he said. "How strange it is, this numbness into which we have grown in four years!" he mused aloud. Why was he not going mad with joy at the prospect? he wondered.

Ah, but he was a poor middle-aged fool, he told himself, soft-headed and heart-sick because a girl

with red gold hair, would not love him. This insane fancy of hers—this clinging to a marriage that was no marriage—had stood between him and happiness, and his misery was rendering him oblivious to all else in life.

But now that she heard his announcement, Arlette was bursting with excitement. The Armistice! It really might be signed, then! Gobin, to be sure, had brought in an early bulletin to the effect that the emissaries had crossed the Frontier and had been with Foch. But there had been too many false hopes raised.

"Here—I brought these for you and Diane," he said, taking two bottles of champagne from his overcoat pockets. "Whether I am to be allowed a sight of her or not, they may prove acceptable." He was weak enough to be sorry for himself. He poured out a draught of cognac from a bottle on the table, and drained the glass.

"I am especially sorry not to see Diane this morning, as I bring good news to her," he said at length.

The two had once more seated themselves, and as he said this Arlette leaned eagerly across the table. "What?" she begged, like a child asking for a sweetmeat. Good news in that attic was as rare as sweetmeats during war, indeed!

And this was the wonderful news the Colonel

brought. Diane's uncle, Georges Vulmir, had died. He had followed his wife—the two not long parted by death, any more than they had ever been in life.

And it seemed that Monsieur Vulmir, in spite of the hard heart which he showed to the world, had always cherished a secret love for little Diane. His death had revealed the fact that he had left her La Salle Farm—the dear old place of so many memories—and a small annuity for life. Not wealth—far from it—but comfort, for the rest of her days. An end to this miserable dragging poverty, this precarious living.

"Oh, I'll run and bring Diane at once! She'll surely come when she hears there is good news!" the rash Arlette cried. "I won't tell her what it is."

She was in hiding somewhere near by, then? Hiding from *him!* Brissac shuddered at the humiliation.

Diane was hiding; she had run across the roof to the Gobin attic to avoid Brissac. Surely she would come at once, Arlette persisted; and off she scampered to try this new persuasion upon the stubborn Diane.

A knock was heard at the attic door. Brissac opened it to admit a messenger—his secretary, Paul Recan.

"What it is?" the Colonel asked.

Recan made a quick report to the effect that he had at last succeeded in locating the man for whom Brissac was searching—Chico. He had been brought to Paris that morning, was in Lorette hospital with four other exchanged prisoners, and lay delirious in a high fever. The medical officer stated that he was beyond hope—practically dead. Any moment might end Chico's struggle.

"Poor girl!" the Colonel murmured—perhaps his sympathy was a bit perfunctory, but it was sympathy, of a kind.

A few small possessions had been taken from the dying man, Recan continued. He had not brought them—hadn't known the Colonel wanted them—would go after them at once. No, Brissac told him, seized by a sudden excitement—he himself would go to the hospital. He wanted to see this thing through personally. And, clutched by a tornado of passion, he pushed Recan out of the room, hurried him off, that he might face Diane alone upon her arrival.

Chico dying! Now, at last, Diane was free! Free from that hideous, fantastic bond to which she had held all these years. At last he, Brissac, was to have his chance. The poor girl has sacrificed four

years of her life to a dream. She must be saved from further suffering. The man whom she chose to call her husband was probably dead at this very moment. She must be taken from this place without delay, to new surroundings where she would begin to live again.

He returned to the table—gulped down another draught of cognac. Steadying himself against the table, he turned blazing expectant eyes toward the window.

That window—the one where, four years before, Diane had alighted like a snowy dove. She had come to him then, believing that she should find Chico; with the light of a heaven full of happiness in her eyes, she had shone there, in her wedding dress.

And now, at the end of those four harrowing years, he looked up once more to find her in the window—clad in the dingy garb of the munitions worker, her face devoid of happiness, and yet serene, somehow, with a deeper light that shone from within. There were strength, poise, and a high purpose written in the grave face; and a sort of somber yet steadfast hope.

Passion seized him. At last! He had not seen

her for months—years—centuries. The sight of her made his head swim. She stood, as before, in the lighted square of the window, a slender silhouette representing all that life and the world held for him.

CHAPTER XX

DIANE'S FAITH FALTERS AT LAST

"Colonel Brissac, you have some good news for me?" Diane asked without preliminary, stepping into the room after a quick glance at his face.

"Diane," he said, trying vainly to steady his voice, "please be calm and listen to me."

She looked away from him and answered quietly, "Arlette said that you had good news."

Useless to try to keep a man with tumult in his veins to the question in hand or the business of the moment—

"Why do you always want to avoid me—to hide from me?" he cried irrelevantly.

"We have gone through all that, have we not?" She turned quickly away, weary.

"Surely, Diane, you can't believe I want to harm you," he pleaded.

She went to the window in silence.

"No—no!" he cried, "don't go! Give me just a moment!"

"Well?" she asked, facing him again patiently.

"When I first came back," he began, "tired and war-weary, I confess I thought I could win you,—that you were like the rest of us—beaten in spirit—too tired to resist—but I was wrong. I did not know you!"

"Please, Colonel Brissac—" she remonstrated.

"Diane, we must be friends!" he interrupted her. "I was wrong at first, I confess it. I will grant anything you choose. But you have taught me the truth—and in all humility I ask you to answer me just one question."

"What is it?" she asked calmly.

He paused before answering—as one must pause before risking what is of priceless value.

"Will you be my wife?"

They scanned each other steadily. There was another pause. One must indeed be callous of heart if one could lightly, dash the hope so frankly legible in a man's eyes—take from them the light, from the heart the joy, from the soul the sustenance.

"Colonel Brissac," she said finally, with all the kindness she could summon, "I have not been frank with you. You say you didn't know me—well,—" she smiled, "we did not know each other. But what you ask is impossible."

"You mean," he said with difficulty, "that you never could care for me?"

"It is not that," she looked away from him and out of the window at the blue distance, "I am married. I am the wife of Chico! The war will be over soon—he is coming back!" Fervor and conviction lighted her face as she spoke.

She stood close to him, yet as remote as a disembodied spirit, and once again he was carried back to that first moment of their meeting when he had looked at her, and in an unaccountable flash of intuition seen, through the tragic mask, the woman in the various aspects she was in the future to present to him. Here was the angel with the flaming sword, barring his way to Paradise—here was the broad, noble brow—the blaze of gold hair—the brave dignity—the impassive calm.

"Diane!" he faltered, stretching out his arm, to her in mingled longing and surrender, and in veneration also. "You might well be the figure of France!" He took one of her hands and kissed it reverently.

To his credit let it be recorded that during this interview no remembrance of his own cause for hope, owed to the cruelty of events, to the knowledge of the blow in store for her, had obtruded itself on

the pure emotion she evoked. His mind had been undividedly occupied with the present. Recan's news was for the time being as completely blotted out of his memory as that of Georges Vulmir's death and Diane's inheritance. He had been too much absorbed in the one vital question of his love for Diane and her possible return of it, to let it be contaminated with personal causes for exultation.

"We are friends?" he asked, taking her hand again.

"Yes," she replied with sincerity.

"Promise me that you are not going to hide from me when I come again."

"I promise."

Diane stood looking after Brissac as the door closed upon him, her heart flooded with sympathy, with sadness, yet with gratitude for a friend reclaimed, for a situation cleared and established on a ground of understanding and truth.

She pressed her hand against her heart. Oh, those women of France, hand on heart, crushing back alarm, and fear, and dread—with steadfast eyes facing the inscrutable future, with its inevitable and incomprehensible allotment of pain!

A cry of joy from Arlette interrupted Diane's

meditation. She bounced in at the window in her haste to be the first to impart something of moment. Close upon her heels was Gobin, the festoons of his mustachios reaching the corners of his eyes, following the semicircular curve of his wreathing smile. The two spoke at once in their excitement.

"Diane! Look!" cried she.

"See who is here," cried he.

Diane, turning, beheld standing before her—Boul! The same Boul as of old! Could one, merely because he belonged to the French army and had repeatedly been cited for distinguished service, expect him to have changed his spots? Boul was still Boul—wearing a soiled and ragged uniform as naturaliy as he had worn the soiled and shabby cab-driver's livery.

"Boul! Boul! Papa Boul!" cried Diane, flinging herself into his arms, at once laughing and sobbing.

"Corporal Jacques Boulevard, of the Motor Transport Service, if you please," corrected Gobin.

Arlette placed a chair for the distinguished visitor. "He has brought something for us," she said, "but he wouldn't say what it was."

Diane looked up at him, smiling with shining

eyes; she held his great bulk off at arm's length, and then with brimming heart fondly kissed him on both dear old friendly cheeks.

"Ha," he roared, "did you see that, Comrade Gobin? Do you think anyone here could get that but me?" He swelled until his belt seemed in danger of bursting. "Arlette was jealous," he said, "because I gave Madame Gobin a string of herrings. Look, ladies, what I brought for *you!*" He rolled up to the table, and reaching deep into his pockets, brought out several cakes of soap of a peculiarly vivid and feverish pink, which he proudly presented.

"Soap!" screamed Arlette, "Soap! Where did you get it?"

He closed an eye, leaving the other very wide open and very full of humorous ferocity. "Never mind," he whispered, with soft, blood-curdling emphasis. Yes, without question, Boul was Boul—still looking askance upon authority, law, order, discipline, and such like as painful and superfluous nuisances, and still warm of heart, generous (most particularly with the property of others), religious, superstitious, rascally, lovable.

He continued to unload his treasures upon the table—handful after handful of cubes of sugar from his knapsack.

"Sugar!" an excited squeal from Arlette.

"Sugar!" A sight of festal anticipation from Diane.

"Yes, my friends," he corroborated, "more than a pound." One eye closed again under a scowl, the other still flung wide, arched by a highly elevated eyebrow, and filled with challenge to all the world. "From the table of my general."

Laughter greeted this guarantee of excellence, as became a circle of good and understanding comrades.

"Are you home to stay with us now?" enquired Gobin.

Boul tapped his breast pocket. "My discharge is in this pocket, and," he slapped the general region of another pocket, "there is money enough here for a new taxicab!"

"Why, that reminds me," said Arlette, "where is the old cab? The one you called Eloise?"

Boul did not answer at once. A tear rose to his heart and gathered in his eye. He looked down to conceal it.

"She's dead."

No one spoke.

"You had not heard?" he asked, looking at each face in turn, as the three drew close to him around the table. Diane shook her head.

"My poor Eloise," he sighed; he stood the cakes of soap on end on the table in front of him. "I will tell you how it was. Here,—" he placed the cognac bottle at a short distance from the wall of soap —"Here is Von Kluck, with the greatest war-machine the world has ever known, marching through Compiegne, on the very gates of Paris,—"

The gates were represented by two of the cakes of soap set up like pillars of a portal.

"The government had fled to Bordeaux—over here somewhere—" He pointed to the left end of the table. "Here was our whole reserve army, hiding behind Paris, our beautiful city about to be destroyed!" He illustrated his description with the remainder of the cakes of soap. "What did Papa Joffre do? He didn't hesitate an instant. *He* knew where to go! He called on *us!*"—Boul thumped his chest,—"the taxicabs of Paris! We brought up our reserves so—" making one mound of the sugar lumps behind the soap fortifications, he pushed them forward with both hands, crouching behind them. "So—" he pushed the sugar forward another step, glaring and lowering—"so!" he growled, pushing them a third station forward. "My God! What a sight!" He picked up a lump from the heap, setting it in front of the rest. "There

was Eloise in the very front, going like a red hot devil, with seven soldiers inside of her and five on top! She rose to it in the end, the old girl! She was heroic! Gave everything she had—never missed fire once—got to the front line *first*—" Boul's voice rose in a dramatic crescendo with each phrase, —"was hit by a shell—blew up—collapsed in the mud." He kissed the lump of sugar and set it down on the table with a rap, as he himself collapsed into a chair. "God rest her soul!" he ended fervently. He sat wiping his eyes with the backs of his two hands, unashamed of a legitimate emotion at thought of the heroic death of his friend.

"Hurray for Eloise!" shrilled Arlette, hugging him.

"It was magnificent!" cried Diane, laying her cheek on his bowed whitening head.

"Papa Boul," she ventured presently, "You—you—never got any news of Chico?" She went and sat opposite him, scanning his face a little fearfully.

Boul shook his head. "None. I was transferred to the Italian front after Mons."

She stretched her clasped hands toward his across the table. "But he will come back soon, with great tales, too, won't he, Boul?" Her glance was troubled in spite of her determined smile.

"Of course." He laid a reassuring hand upon her two.

Gobin and Arlette stood watching her with that look of tenderness which those feel who behold the continuance of hope beyond the bounds of credibility. Gobin cast a despairing look at Arlette, which frankly said: "Poor Diane! after four years of silence, after the report of 'missing,' she continues to believe Chico alive and well." Wordlessly he conveyed to her that Boul and Diane were better left to talk alone, and Arlette comprehending followed him quietly out of the window.

"Dear old friend," Diane continued when they were alone, "the sound of your voice is so good! These hands," she laid her cheek against the rough paw which she now clasped, "these hands touched him—these eyes," she placed her fingers on his brows in a caress, "these eyes saw him—" her voice broke.

"This heart loved him," said Boul. "Chico! There was a man! He might have been a king!" His tone was at once elate and sad.

"You think so, too, Boul?" she smiled with trembling lips. "It was not just because I loved him?"

"He was a wonderful man," said Boul devoutly.

Diane came to sit on the corner of the table, the more confidentially to reach Boul's ear.

"He was a very remarkable fellow," she agreed, the old humorous twinkle lighting her speech. "You know, Boul, the first time I saw him—when he rose from the ground——there were stars in his hands—I saw them!"

As she sat near him, her feet resting on the edge of his chair, his hand still held between her own on her lap, Boul looked up at her like a faithful old dog, who will wag an acquiescent tail at any incomprehensible remark of a beloved person.

"Of course there were," he blindly agreed.

"Then that glorious ride, when you brought us here—to—Heaven—" she continued.

"It has been a sad Heaven for you, I'm afraid," he said, pressing her fingers.

"Why, no;" she shook her head pensively, "I have never told anyone this, but you will understand —you —won't laugh," she looked trustfully at him.

"Laugh!" he disclaimed, leaning toward her.

"When he went away," she began her confidence, "we promised that we would join each other in spirit every morning at eleven o'clock—and he has never failed me." She spoke very low and earnestly. "Even when I was at the turning lathe, in all that noise, I would feel him so clearly, standing by my side; and then when I went on the night shift and

came back here mornings, no matter how tired I was, how deep in sleep, I would always wake up to find it eleven o'clock on the stroke. He was always there—" her grey eyes had a vision-seeing quality as they fixed themselves on a point near the door, where Chico had stood when he had given his promise.

Boul involuntarily turned his head in the same direction.

"He always came," she continued, "he restored my sometimes fainting hope, lifted my sometimes fainting heart, renewed my hold on life, refreshed my spirit like wine, fed my soul—" She seemed like a dedicated priestess repeating the articles of her Creed.

Both were silent, still looking toward the door. They saw it open. Brissac entered. Like the breaking of a spell was the different atmosphere that instantly filled the room.

Boul, recognizing the uniform and rank of the Colonel, rose and stood stiffly at salute.

"I beg your pardon," said Brissac to Diane. "You did not hear me knock. I thought you must be out, and only tried the door, which opened under my hand." He then looked inquiringly at Boul.

"An old friend of my husband's," explained Diane.

"Boul, Corporal, 24th Motor Transport Service," said the old man with military crispness, still standing with hand rigidly held to his temple.

"Of course," explained the Colonel, "I remember you well." He nodded gravely. "I am glad you are here." He turned to Diane. She noticed his pallor.

"Diane needs good friends just now," he added meaningly. She looked at him, puzzled and frightened. "I wanted to be with you when you received the news." He paused. "I need not tell you to be brave————"

Her eyes dilated with dread. "What news have you?"

He took a paper from his pocket. "I wish to Heaven I could spare you. I have brought these things myself." He added a small packet to the printed notice which he laid on the table, and opened it.

She did not look at him now, did not see what he was doing; her eyes had again fastened upon the spot where Chico had last stood, and where she had daily known him, felt him standing, almost, almost, dear God, seen him———

"I don't believe it," she said in a dry tone.

"This picture," said Brissac, picking up the picture of her and Chico together——

"No." Her low cry was stubborn in its set intensity.

"His identification disc—"

"I won't, I won't believe it!" The voice was weaker, but the mind must shut out such horrors!

"And this religious medal—" Brissac placed it on the table. Diane turned, and with a trembling hand picked up the medal. She took the one that hung around her neck in the other hand and looked at them both for a moment.

Her capitulation was instantaneous; her decision as swift as her faith had been unquestioning.

"Look out!"

"Quick, Boul!"

"Stop her!"

With confused exclamations the two men, caught unawares, were barely in time to prevent that fleet black figure from taking its strong determined way out of the window, and precipitating itself to the street below.

They caught her, quelled the brief, lightning rush of her revolt. Very gently, one on either side, they brought her back from the window and seated her

by the table, as limp now as she had a moment ago been taut.

"Boul, leave us alone," commanded the Colonel.

"But, if you please, Colonel—" protested Boul.

"Go!" The order was curt.

Boul responded with a reluctant salute. For a moment he went over and laid his cheek against Diane's bowed head, then obeyed.

CHAPTER XXI

THE CLOCK STRIKES ELEVEN

Brissac stood behind Diane's chair. She leaned forward in a broken attitude across the table, very still. He raised a hesitating hand, and was about to lay it on her shoulder; with a helpless gesture he refrained. Her arm was now rising and falling mechanically as she beat her clinched fist insistently upon the table. He tried to break the silence.

"Diane, my poor child," he finally whispered hoarsely.

In a dull voice she spoke: "But he came to me?"

Sympathy without the faintest understanding of her meaning prompted him: "Ye-es," he agreed uncertainly.

"Then he didn't come?" she as incomprehensibly continued.

"No," he made the word as comforting as he believed she needed that it should be.

"No—no—he couldn't have come," she went on. She was steadily looking at the little portrait of

Chico and herself which she held in the hollow of her hand.

"Courage!" he breathed, touching her hand reassuringly.

"Courage!" she cried bitterly, shaking him off. "*Courage?*"

"Diane, this is no place for you now," he said, laying his hand tenderly on her shoulder.

"He never came at all," she continued.

Again not understanding, but most tender, "No," he rejoined.

"I just imagined he came here, didn't I?" She was talking through unshed tears that contracted her throat and made her voice thin as that of a child who struggles with sobs.

"Yes," he said softly.

"It seems so foolish now." She tried to scoff.

"My poor Diane!"

"I was so sure!"

"There—there—" he soothed the pitiable creature.

"I thought the *Bon Dieu* was helping me!" she derided herself. "For four years——! What nonsense! What childish nonsense!" Heartbreaking to hear, the heartbreak in that broken jibe.

"Diane," he said resolutely, "from now on I am going to take care of you."

Unexpectedly acquiescent she rose. "Yes!" What does it matter?" she said woefully.

"Come," he cried, with difficulty restraining the flood of tenderness and exultation that swept over him. ("Victory! Victory!" cried his jubilant heart.)

With an arm around her shoulders, he led her away from the table. She went submissively, but, on reaching the door, stopped and turned to regard the little room through the barrier of a lost illusion.

"I called it Heaven!" she whispered.

The chime in the neighboring bell-tower struck eleven.

Eagerly she broke away from his arm and took a few hasty steps back into the room, where she stood listening, looking like one expecting something to happen. A faint light of hope had crept back into her eyes. Resignedly he waited for her. She continued to stand irresolute, listening and looking about her.

"What is it?" he cried anxiously, suddenly taking alarm.

"Eleven o'clock," she answered simply. "I got into the habit of believing."

With a sudden gesture she took off the medal

hanging on its chain about her neck and laid it on the table, then sank weakly into the chair beside it, once more burying her face in her arms.

"I'm back at the beginning again!" she wailed.

"Come away, Diane, come away—" he urged passionately, holding out his arms to her.

"Yes—yes," she whispered, rising and turning to him. But her movements were those of an automaton.

Of a sudden the deep bellow of cannon made the crazy windows rattle. A cloud of sounds gathered and enveloped all the earth; sounds of every description, till the wonder was how so many noise-producing implements could on such short notice have been procured by so many mortals, to add to the sum of din rising heavenward in a complex composite.

Diane and Brissac stared at each other. He went to the window, flung it open, and stood in the sunshine, as the full-throated roar of the Armistice burst in and broke over them both.

Bells, gongs, the booming of artillery, drums, rattles, horns, bands of music trumpet-tongued, and the great wave of triumphant human voices raised in laughter, in song, in shrill or deep shouts and huzzahs!

"Look!" he cried, "Look! It's over!"

She went to the window. He pointed at the wild crowds surging like surf below.

"They've signed the Armistice!" he went on hysterically. "The war is over! Look at them! Look! Oh, *mon Dieu,* France is saved!" His hands went up to his eyes; he stood pressing them with a gesture expressive of all the relief from pain and despair that could not for the moment be conveyed by mirth.

Everything happened at once. Boul strode in without notice at the door, and ran shouting toward Brissac.

"Do you hear that?" he bawled. "The war is over!"

"Yes, yes, God be praised!"

Boul incontinently fell upon the Colonel's neck, who laughingly embraced him.

Gobin, Arlette and Pere Chevillon hurried across the roofs and scrambled into the room with mingled cries of "*Vive la France!*" The War is over!" "No more war!" "Oh! Oh!——"

The priest alone expressed his elation through a different channel "Gloria in excelsis!" he pealed.

And Diane stood listless in all the tumult, leaning against the window-frame, absently contemplating the street.

Arlette seized the armless sleeve of Gobin, who in turn took Boul's hand, and together they circled the room wildly. Brissac closed the window for the din was deafening. Pere Chevillon in a corner stood with bowed head praying, his hands fumbling at his rosary, tears streaming through his closed lids. To add to the general confusion Recan now stumbled in, covered with paper streamers.

"My Colonel, they have signed! They have signed!" He threw confetti from his bulging pockets at the assemblage, and was embracing Diane with zeal.

"Leave her alone, idiot!" cried Brissac with a lusty push, sending him reeling across the room.

Diane seemed to awaken out of her daze. She looked about her at the delirious company. Only a muffled roar could now be heard through the closed windows. "No—No!" she suddenly stormed. "Stop it—stop it!"

The hilarious shouts were hushed; the capering ceased; all paused and looked open-mouthed at her. She had caught sight of the priest, standing apart telling his beads; she turned upon him an infuriated visage.

"What are you doing—you?" she raged, "Praying?" She laughed. "To what, I'd like to know?

A William Fox Production. *Seventh Heaven.*

"THIS WILL BE OUR SEVENTH HEAVEN."

Tell me! Tell me! To that nonsense they call the *Bon Dieu?*"

"Diane, dear, don't!" entreated Brissac, hastening to her side.

"Stand away!" she flung away his restraining hand. "I know what I am saying! For four years I believed that I was married, and that a *Bon Dieu* was protecting me! *Bon Dieu!*" she sneered. "There's nothing! It is all false! I pretended this place was heaven—I clung to that Idea as Chico told me to—but it's all gone—all gone! He is dead! Now, when I want your *bon Dieu* most, he is not here! He doesn't exist! There's nothing—nothing—NOTHING!" she ended in a shrill wail that was like the bleak, despairing wind shrieking in a desolate solitude.

"Diane, dear, please—come away with me, my poor child, my poor love!" Brissac himself was near to the breaking point.

"Yes," she went on incoherently. "That's it—you are right—take me wherever you want me to go—anywhere. The war is over, isn't it? It's over—it's over—it's over—" Sobbing she turned as he caught her in his arms.

He held her close, soothing her like a child.

"Diane, my poor girl—I know how you've suf-

fered—I know. But I will care for you always—I love you! I love you!" he murmured. She lay unresisting. He tenderly kissed her, again—again—again—on the closed lids—the pale cheeks—the warm white neck—. Oh, God! That it should have come—the end of the war—and Diane in his arms! Victory! Victory! After long battle and delay—

He was kissing Diane (how could he bear ever to cease?) when there fell an unaccountable cessation of sound following a perceptible commotion near the door. There Arlette, Boul, Gobin and Recan had gathered in a knot, and had been until this moment all laughing and talking at once, as they opened the champagne bottles, and poured and drank great bumpers. Brissac glanced up to account for the sudden silence.

In the doorway facing him was Chico.

Chico, pale as death, gaunt, disheveled, and in rags—but Chico alive, draped fantastically with multicolored festoons of paper streamers, which clung to him as might brambles after a race through underbrush. His emaciated, haggard face was lighted with a pitiful smile.

Brissac stood transfixed, after the first bewildered start.

Diane, was aware of nothing; with closed eyes she still lay against the Colonel's shoulder, his arms her only security in her crumbled and collapsed world.

"Diane!" cried Chico, "Diane!"

Slowly Diane turned and faced him. She was seeing a ghost.

"Diane!" This time the call held a note of protest, of accusation.

She stood still, with stony eyes riveted upon him.

Breathless from his climb of six flights of stairs in pursuit, the Rat—even so, the Sewer Rat—self-respecting participant in the four years' fray, in the uniform of Hospital Attendant, a Red Cross brassard on his arm, appeared in the doorway behind Chico, expostulating vehemently as he grasped him by the arm.

"You shouldn't, Chico!" he scolded. "You shouldn't have left the hospital. It is madness in your condition. Madness, suicide!"

Chico shook him off roughly, and stood glooming at Diane and Brissac. "Get away from me," he cried furiously. "Get out of my way!"

He took a menacing step toward the two.

"Don't look at me like that!" cried Diane, covering her face.

"Bebe!" he called in a voice of yearning, coming

forward with both hands extended in front of nim, groping—"Bebe! Where are you?" He was looking directly at her.

With fascinated, unbelieving eyes, Diane crept toward him, the truth gradually reaching her, at sight of him standing with those helpless groping hands outstretched,—she passed her palm to and fro close to his face—he remained unblinking, vaguely smiling—

When she was sure, she sank to the ground at his feet, clasping his knees, sobbing with mingled anguish and relief, inexpressible joy and pain—

"Ah!" he cried brokenly, at the feel of her arms. "Ah! *Cherie!* My eyes are still filled with you! It is all true. And I thought the *Bon Dieu* had failed me!" He laughed exultantly as he bent and raised her, clasping her to his overflowing heart. "He has not, Bebe! At the hospital they thought I was dead. But when I returned to consciousness—when I woke up from a long nightmare and asked where I was—and they told me I was in Paris—near *you!* Snakes of Snakes, they couldn't hold me—could they, Sewer Rat?"

The Rat nodded and held up eloquent hands of dismay at the remembered scene, which only the confusion of the Armistice madness had interrupted,

and in which Chico had coerced him into bringing him here, and then outstripped him in his leaping ascent of the stairs.

"Death? Bah!" laughed Chico. "I've been hit by every shell that's made—but nothing can kill me! I shall never die! And I'll *see!* They can't keep me blind! I'll show them all! Because it's all true, *Cherie*—those big thoughts I had *were* the *Bon Dieu*, after all—He is within us," he said humbly, proudly. "Now that I am blind, I see that. I tell you," he broke off with the old whimsical smile, "I am a very remarkable fellow!"

The End of the story? No! For Chico and Diane the beginning—of peace, of returning life, of daily deepening devotion, of union, indeed; of grateful enjoyment of the humble daily pleasure of awakening in the limpid dawn to the chorus of happy bird voices, after the din and dirt of war; of the daily cycle of humble tasks in the dear old farm house; preparing the simple food, drawing clean, cool water from the well, lingering there a moment, inhaling the sweet wind blowing over perfumed fields from a beneficent sea; making good red wine from the grapes over the shady arbor, on mellow, golden autumn afternoons.

And then, the sitting side by side, hand in loving hand, on the bench by the door—watching the quiet setting of the sun, the stars' kindling and the great moon's rising. The going to rest in the silence of the fearless night, under the wings of Him who can lift up the humble and the sinful to His heart—who can make whole the broken, cause the blind to see, and make glad at last the hearts of His poor children—ah, never the end, indeed!

"The Books You Like to Read
at the Price You Like to Pay"

There Are Two Sides to Everything—

—including the wrapper which covers every Grosset & Dunlap book. When you feel in the mood for a good romance, refer to the carefully selected list of modern fiction comprising most of the successes by prominent writers of the day which is printed on the back of every Grosset & Dunlap book wrapper.

You will find more than five hundred titles to choose from—books for every mood and every taste and every pocketbook.

Don't forget the other side, but in case the wrapper is lost, write to the publishers for a complete catalog.

There is a Grosset & Dunlap Book
for every mood and for every taste

THE NOVELS OF TEMPLE BAILEY

May be had wherever books are sold. Ask for Grosset & Dunlap's list.

THE BLUE WINDOW

The heroine, Hildegarde, finds herself transplanted from the middle western farm to the gay social whirl of the East. She is almost swept off her feet, but in the end she proves true blue.

PEACOCK FEATHERS

The eternal conflict between wealth and love. Jerry, the idealist who is poor, loves Mimi, a beautiful, spoiled society girl.

THE DIM LANTERN

The romance of little Jane Barnes who is loved by two men.

THE GAY COCKADE

Unusual short stories where Miss Bailey shows her keen knowledge of character and environment, and how romance comes to different people.

THE TRUMPETER SWAN

Randy Paine comes back from France to the monotony of every-day affairs. But the girl he loves shows him the beauty in the common place.

THE TIN SOLDIER

A man who wishes to serve his country, but is bound by a tie he cannot in honor break—that's Derry. A girl who loves him, shares his humiliation and helps him to win—that's Jean. Their love is the story.

MISTRESS ANNE

A girl in Maryland teaches school, and believes that work is worthy service. Two men come to the little community; one is weak, the other strong, and both need Anne.

CONTRARY MARY

An old-fashioned love story that is nevertheless modern.

GLORY OF YOUTH

A novel that deals with a question, old and yet ever new—how far should an engagement of marriage bind two persons who discover they no longer love.

GROSSET & DUNLAP, PUBLISHERS, NEW YORK

THE NOVELS OF
GRACE LIVINGSTON HILL

May be had wherever books are sold. Ask for Grosset & Dunlap's list.

BEST MAN, THE
CITY OF FIRE, THE
CLOUDY JEWEL
DAWN OF THE MORNING
ENCHANTED BARN, THE
EXIT BETTY
FINDING OF JASPER HOLT, THE
GIRL FROM MONTANA, THE
LO, MICHAEL!
MAN OF THE DESERT, THE
MARCIA SCHUYLER
MIRANDA
MYSTERY OF MARY, THE
NOT UNDER THE LAW
OBSESSION OF VICTORIA GRACEN, THE
PHOEBE DEANE
RE-CREATIONS
RED SIGNAL, THE
SEARCH, THE
STORY OF A WHIM, THE
TOMORROW ABOUT THIS TIME
TRYST, THE
VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS, A
WITNESS, THE

GROSSET & DUNLAP, *Publishers*, NEW YORK

MARGARET PEDLER'S NOVELS

May be had wherever books are sold. Ask for Grosset & Dunlap's list.

TO-MORROW'S TANGLE

The game of love is fraught with danger. To win in the finest sense, it must be played fairly.

RED ASHES

A gripping story of a doctor who failed in a crucial operation---and had only himself to blame. Could the woman he loved forgive him?

THE BARBARIAN LOVER

A love story based on the creed that the only important things between birth and death are the courage to face life and the love to sweeten it.

THE MOON OUT OF REACH

Nan Davenant's problem is one that many a girl has faced---her own happiness or her father's bond.

THE HOUSE OF DREAMS-COME-TRUE

How a man and a woman fulfilled a Gypsy's strange prophecy.

THE HERMIT OF FAR END

How love made its way into a walled-in house and a walled-in heart.

THE LAMP OF FATE

The story of a woman who tried to take all and give nothing.

THE SPLENDID FOLLY

Do you believe that husbands and wives should have no secrets from each other?

THE VISION OF DESIRE

An absorbing romance written with all that sense of feminine tenderness that has given the novels of Margaret Pedler their universal appeal.

WAVES OF DESTINY

Each of these stories has the sharp impact of an emotional crisis---the compressed quality of one of Margaret Pedler's widely popular novels.

GROSSET & DUNLAP, *Publishers*, NEW YORK

DETECTIVE STORIES BY J. S. FLETCHER

May be had wherever books are sold. Ask for Grosset & Dunlap's list

THE SECRET OF THE BARBICAN

THE ANNEXATION SOCIETY

THE WOLVES AND THE LAMB

GREEN INK

THE KING versus WARGRAVE

THE LOST MR. LINTHWAITE

THE MILL OF MANY WINDOWS

THE HEAVEN-KISSED HILL

THE MIDDLE TEMPLE MURDER

RAVENSDENE COURT

THE RAYNER-SLADE AMALGAMATION

THE SAFETY PIN

THE SECRET WAY

THE VALLEY OF HEADSTRONG MEN

Ask for Complete free list of G. & D. Popular Copyrighted Fiction

GROSSET & DUNLAP, *Publishers,* NEW YORK

RAFAEL SABATINI'S NOVELS

May be had wherever books are sold. Ask for Grosset and Dunlap's list.

Jesi, a diminutive city of the Italian Marches, was the birthplace of Rafael Sabatini, and here he spent his early youth. The city is glamorous with those centuries the author makes live again in his novels with all their violence and beauty.

Mr. Sabatini first went to school in Switzerland and from there to Lycee of Oporto, Portugal, and like Joseph Conrad, he has never attended an English school. But English is hardly an adopted language for him, as he learned it from his mother, an English woman who married the Maestro-Cavaliere Vincenzo Sabatini.

Today Rafael Sabatini is regarded as "The Alexandre Dumas of Modern Fiction."

MISTRESS WILDING

A romance of the days of Monmouth's rebellion. The action is rapid, its style is spirited, and its plot is convincing.

FORTUNE'S FOOL

All who enjoyed the lurid lights of the French Revolution with Scaramouche, or the brilliant buccaneering days of Peter Blood, or the adventures of the Sea-Hawk, the corsair, will now welcome with delight a turn in Restoration London with the always masterful Col. Randall Holles.

BARDELYS THE MAGNIFICENT

An absorbing story of love and adventure in France of the early seventeenth century.

THE SNARE

It is a story in which fact and fiction are delightfully blended and one that is entertaining in high degree from first to last.

CAPTAIN BLOOD

The story has glamor and beauty, and it is told with an easy confidence. As for Blood himself, he is a superman, compounded of a sardonic humor, cold nerves, and hot temper. Both the story and the man are masterpieces. A great figure, a great epoch, a great story.

THE SEA-HAWK

"The Sea-Hawk" is a book of fierce bright color and amazing adventure through which stalks one of the truly great and masterful figures of romance.

SCARAMOUCHE

Never will the reader forget the sardonic Scaramouche, who fights equally well with tongue and rapier, who was "born with the gift of laughter and a sense that the world was mad."

GROSSET & DUNLAP, *Publishers,* NEW YORK

ZANE GREY'S NOVELS

May be had wherever books are sold. Ask for Grosset & Dunlap's list

TAPPAN'S BURRO
THE VANISHING AMERICAN
THE THUNDERING HERD
THE CALL OF THE CANYON
WANDERER OF THE WASTELAND
TO THE LAST MAN
THE MYSTERIOUS RIDER
THE MAN OF THE FOREST
THE DESERT OF WHEAT
THE U. P. TRAIL
WILDFIRE
THE BORDER LEGION
THE RAINBOW TRAIL
THE HERITAGE OF THE DESERT
RIDERS OF THE PURPLE SAGE
THE LIGHT OF WESTERN STARS
THE LAST OF THE PLAINSMEN
THE LONE STAR RANGER
DESERT GOLD
BETTY ZANE
THE DAY OF THE BEAST

* * * * * * *

LAST OF THE GREAT SCOUTS

The life story of "Buffalo Bill" by his sister Helen Cody Wetmore, with Foreword and conclusion by Zane Grey.

ZANE GREY'S BOOKS FOR BOYS

ROPING LIONS IN THE GRAND CANYON
KEN WARD IN THE JUNGLE
THE YOUNG LION HUNTER
THE YOUNG FORESTER
THE YOUNG PITCHER
THE SHORT STOP
THE RED-HEADED OUTFIELD AND OTHER BASEBALL STORIES

GROSSET & DUNLAP, *Publishers,* NEW YORK

EMERSON HOUGH'S NOVELS

May be had wherever books are sold. Ask for Grosset and Dunlap's list.

THE SHIP OF SOULS

MOTHER OF GOLD

THE COVERED WAGON

NORTH OF 36

THE WAY OF A MAN

THE SAGEBRUSHER

THE GIRL AT THE HALFWAY HOUSE

THE WAY OUT

THE MAN NEXT DOOR

THE MAGNIFICENT ADVENTURE

THE BROKEN GATE

THE STORY OF THE COWBOY

54-40 OR FIGHT

THE MISSISSIPPI BUBBLE

THE PURCHASE PRICE

GROSSET & DUNLAP, *Publishers,* NEW YORK

THE NOVELS OF BEATRICE BURTON

May be had wherever books are sold. Ask for Grosset & Dunlap's list

BEATRICE BURTON has the uncanny ability to see through all of the reckless confusion of the modern age to the primitive emotions and passions which direct the hearts of men and women. These romances caused a tremendous sensation when they first appeared as newspaper serials. They are now all available in book form in the Grosset & Dunlap Edition.

THE HOLLYWOOD GIRL

Bobbie Ransom was movie mad. Her life was monotonous and she finally decided to go to Hollywood. After a month, Bobbie was taken on as an extra in a color film and her further experiences are graphically told in this very interesting book.

HONEY LOU, or THE LOVE WRECKER

This is the story of the first year of Honey Lou's married life and how it almost came to grief through the efforts of a "love wrecker."

THE PETTER

Because life seemed just a gay series of petting parties to "Merry" Locke she did not recognize the Real Thing when it came along.

HER MAN

The story of a girl who gave everything and still could not hold the man she loved.

LOVE BOUND (*Gilded Kisses*)

Where does a pretty girl get all the things she can't afford? Does love piracy pay?

THE FLAPPER WIFE

She yearned for ease and beautiful clothes and fluttered too close to the consuming flame.

FOOTLOOSE (*Sequel to the "Flapper Wife"*)

The story of a girl who tasted the bitterness of life, but found in the end that love heals and love restores.

GROSSET & DUNLAP, *Publishers*, NEW YORK

PETER B. KYNE'S NOVELS

May be had wherever books are sold. Ask for Grosset and Dunlap's list.

THE ENCHANTED HILL

A gorgeous story with a thrilling mystery and a beautiful girl.

NEVER THE TWAIN SHALL MEET

A romance of California and the South Seas.

CAPPY RICKS RETIRES

Cappy retires, but the romance of the sea and business, keep calling him back, and he comes back strong.

THE PRIDE OF PALOMAR

When two strong men clash and the under-dog has Irish blood in his veins—there's a tale that Kyne can tell!

KINDRED OF THE DUST

Donald McKay, son of Hector McKay, millionaire lumber king, falls in love with "Nan of the sawdust pile," a charming girl who has been ostracized by her townsfolk.

THE VALLEY OF THE GIANTS

The fight of the Cardigans, father and son, to hold the Valley of the Giants against treachery.

CAPPY RICKS

Cappy Ricks gave Matt Peasley the acid test because he knew it was good for his soul.

WEBSTER: MAN'S MAN

A man and a woman hailing from the "States," met up with a revolution while in Central America. Adventures and excitement came so thick and fast that their love affair had to wait for a lull in the game.

CAPTAIN SCRAGGS

This sea yarn recounts the adventures of three rapscallion seafaring men.

THE LONG CHANCE

Harley P. Hennage is the best gambler, the best and worst man of San Pasqual and of lovely Donna.

GROSSET & DUNLAP, PUBLISHERS, NEW YORK